
**Advisory Committee on the Health Emergency Response
to COVID-19 for People with Disability
Meeting 2 May 2023 – Summary of Outcomes**

The Commonwealth's Deputy Chief Medical Officer, Prof Michael Kidd AM, provided a COVID-19 epidemiological update. COVID-19 case numbers have recently risen from a low point in mid-February. The number of people with serious illness from COVID-19 is much lower than it was at the peak of the last wave on 30 December 2022. Less serious illness is likely because of high vaccination levels, and hybrid immunity from vaccination and COVID-19 infection. Committee members sought any updated advice on consuming COVID-19 treatments for people with swallowing difficulties.

The Department of Health and Aged Care presented on the 2023 seasonal influenza vaccination program, including:

- background on the 2022 influenza season, including case numbers and vaccine uptake
- the National Immunisation Program (NIP), which funds free influenza vaccines for people most at risk from influenza, and
- uptake of the influenza vaccine in 2023.

The Committee discussed:

- eligibility criteria for influenza vaccination under the NIP. Members emphasised the need to effectively communicate that criteria to people with disability.
- the importance of state/territory government services to support access to vaccination for people with disability and programs like the NIP, and
- the use of data linkage to identify rates of influenza vaccination uptake for people with disability. The department's Health and Economics Research Division (HERD) reported that this work is under way.

Presentations on COVID-19 vaccine effectiveness and data included:

- Assoc Prof Bette Liu from the National Centre for Immunisation Research and Surveillance summarised recent research on COVID-19 vaccination effectiveness in preventing deaths. The research shows that every extra dose provides increased protection against death from COVID-19.
- HERD presented on COVID-19 vaccine coverage and mortality for people with disability.

The Committee also discussed proposed messaging for the disability community to share insights from data on COVID-19 mortality and vaccination. Members were asked to give further advice out of session.

NEXT STEPS

The department will:

- circulate advice published and referred to by the department on the recommended use of COVID-19 treatments for people with swallowing difficulties
- circulate information on eligibility for the National Immunisation Program based on medical risk factors
- ask state and territory health departments to give information on programs to support access to influenza vaccination for people with disability, and
- seek further Committee input, out of session, on proposed messaging for the disability community to share insights from data on COVID-19 mortality and vaccination.

The Committee's next meeting will be on 6 June 2023.