



Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI)

Summary of the 105th meeting, 16 and 17 May 2024

Herpes zoster (shingles)

- [Shingrix is available under the NIP](#) for people aged 65 years and over, First Nations people aged 50 years and over, and severely immunocompromised people aged 18 years and over.
- ATAGI was pleased to note that the recent Budget announced funding for Shingrix in moderately immunocompromised people aged 18 years and over.
- ATAGI endorsed the public consultation document for proposed changes to the zoster chapter of the Australian Immunisation Handbook. Public consultation is expected to occur in June 2024 through the department's [Consultation Hub](#).

Pertussis (whooping cough)

- ATAGI discussed the increasing pertussis notifications around Australia and the potential for a pertussis outbreak in 2024. Members noted that [pertussis cases have been increasing in the UK, including 5 infant deaths](#) between January and March 2024.
- ATAGI emphasised the importance of protecting infants against pertussis by vaccinating pregnant women. [ATAGI recommends vaccination during pregnancy](#) because this reduces the risk of pertussis in young infants by 90%. Pertussis vaccine is free for pregnant women under the NIP.
- It is important for health professionals to complete the pregnancy status field when recording vaccinations given during pregnancy on the Australian Immunisation Register (AIR). This will ensure that Australia has accurate data on maternal immunisation to inform policies and programs.
- ATAGI also recommends pertussis vaccination for infants and children, adolescents, adults aged 50 years and adults aged 65 years. See the [Australian Immunisation Handbook](#) for more details.

Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV)

- ATAGI noted that Abrysvo RSV vaccine had been considered at the March 2024 meeting of the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee (PBAC) for prevention of lower respiratory tract illness caused by RSV in infants from birth through to 6 months of age by active immunisation of pregnant individuals. The [PBAC did not recommend](#) Abrysvo for listing on the NIP at this time because of the high and uncertain incremental cost-effectiveness ratio (ICER).

- At its [July 2024 meeting](#), the PBAC will consider Arexvy RSV vaccine for adults aged 60 years and over, as well as nirsevimab (a long-acting monoclonal antibody) for infants and children up to 2 years of age.
- ATAGI reviewed and endorsed the new RSV chapter of the Australian Immunisation Handbook, which will be published online and then undergo public consultation, expected in June 2024.
- ATAGI endorsed the *ATAGI targeted review 2024: immunisation strategies for prevention and control of respiratory syncytial virus disease in Australia*. The review will be published in the [Communicable Diseases Intelligence](#) journal later in 2024.

Influenza

- As the 2024 influenza season continues, ATAGI emphasised the importance of annual influenza vaccination for everyone aged 6 months and over.
- Influenza vaccine is free under the NIP for children under 5, pregnant women at any stage during pregnancy, First Nations people aged 6 months and over, people aged 65 years and over, and people with certain medical conditions. States and territories may also offer free vaccination for other groups.
- ATAGI noted the department has published resources for consumers and health professionals on [getting vaccinated against influenza in 2024](#).
- ATAGI noted the current influenza vaccination coverage in Australia, as outlined in the [National Centre for Immunisation Research and Surveillance \(NCIRS\) dashboard](#).
- ATAGI's influenza subgroup is developing advice on Australia's transition to trivalent influenza vaccines, as recommended by the World Health Organization.
- ATAGI noted the outbreaks of highly pathogenic avian influenza being reported in other countries in birds, mammals and occasionally humans, and will maintain a watching brief on this issue.

COVID-19

- COVID-19 cases are increasing across Australia. ATAGI emphasised the importance of remaining up to date with COVID-19 vaccination. ATAGI's recommendations for COVID-19 vaccination are published in the [COVID-19 chapter](#) of the Australian Immunisation Handbook.
- ATAGI is planning a debrief on their role during the COVID-19 pandemic to discuss lessons learned and opportunities for improved capacity, preparedness and responsiveness for future pandemic situations.
- ATAGI received an update on the [COVID-19 Vaccine Claims Scheme](#), as well as an update on research into myocarditis following COVID-19 vaccines.
- ATAGI reviewed and discussed the ongoing Grading of Recommendations, Assessment, Development and Evaluation (GRADE) assessment for COVID-19 vaccines, which supports the recommendations in the Australian Immunisation Handbook.

Vaccination for people who are immunocompromised

- ATAGI discussed and endorsed updates to the Australian Immunisation Handbook section on [vaccination for people who are immunocompromised](#). The updates aim to

simplify and clarify vaccination guidance for providers. The proposed updates will undergo targeted consultation later in 2024.

- ATAGI confirmed that the topic for its 2025 targeted review would focus on special risk groups for vaccination, including people who are immunocompromised.

First Nations health issues

- ATAGI received a presentation from a National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO) representative of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Protection (NATSIHP) sub-committee of the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC).
- Priority Reform Four of the [National Agreement on Closing the Gap](#) involves shared access to data and information at a regional level. As part of this reform, NATSIHP has developed a First Nations National Notifiable Diseases Surveillance System Dashboard (the Dashboard) to collate timely data that are relevant to the prevention and control of communicable diseases among First Nations people. The Dashboard aims to inform strategic thinking and priority setting, and enable evidence-based decisions by and for First Nations people.
- ATAGI emphasised the importance of having complete data on Indigenous status in disease notifications, but noted the complex factors that influence whether a person identifies as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander in healthcare settings. ATAGI was enthusiastic about the Dashboard and looked forward to receiving access to the Dashboard to begin using the data to improve its advice to government on First Nations immunisation.

National Immunisation Program Vaccinations in Pharmacy (NIPVIP) Program

- ATAGI was pleased to note that the 2024-25 Budget included funding to expand the [NIPVIP program](#) to allow pharmacists to administer vaccines in disability and aged care facilities.
- The NCIRS has published a [summary of the vaccines that can be administered in community pharmacies](#), who can get these vaccines and if they are free.

Department and committee updates

- The interim [Australian Centre for Disease Control](#) is inviting public feedback on the draft [National Immunisation Strategy 2025 to 2030](#). This strategy will guide Australia's immunisation efforts over the next 5 years, aiming to increase immunisation rates and reduce vaccine-preventable diseases. Consultation is open until 5 June 2024.
- The department informed ATAGI of a new National Immunisation Division within the department, which brings together work undertaken by the department on the NIP and the COVID-19 Vaccine Program.
- ATAGI received an update from the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) on vaccines that are currently under evaluation for registration in Australia.
- ATAGI received an update from the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee (PBAC), which considers vaccines for inclusion on the NIP.
- ATAGI received an update from the Communicable Diseases Network Australia (CDNA) on vaccine-preventable disease notifications in Australia and other countries.

Other business

- ATAGI received an update from the NCIRS, including data on immunisation coverage, and a summary of discussions and decisions from national immunisation technical advisory groups (NITAGs) from other countries and their potential relevance to Australia.
- Members noted that this was Dr Nicholas Silberstein's last ATAGI meeting. Members thanked Dr Silberstein for his valuable contributions to ATAGI, and particularly for his insights from the primary care perspective.

ATAGI Horizon Scanning Industry Day (HSID)

- ATAGI discussed the information presented by sponsors at the ATAGI HSID, held on 15 May 2024. A range of vaccine manufacturers in the region were invited to attend by videoconference to provide updates on their future vaccine products. HSID is important to identify vaccines in the pipeline that will require ATAGI consideration over the next 1 to 2 years.
- Companies that were invited to present at HSID in 2024 were AstraZeneca, Bioclect, Bavarian Nordic, CSL Seqirus, GSK, Moderna, MSD, Novavax, Pfizer, Sanofi, Takeda and Vaxxas.

Resources

- ATAGI's membership, terms of reference and declaration of interest information is available on the [Department of Health and Aged Care website](#).