



COVID-19 Vaccination and Antiviral Treatments

Information for residents living in aged care homes and their families and carers

COVID-19 Vaccination

Older age continues to be the biggest risk factor for severe cases of COVID-19. Vaccination is the best way to protect older people from severe illness, hospitalisation or death from COVID-19.

COVID-19 vaccination is recommended for:

- people aged 75 years and older - **every 6 months**.
- people aged 65 to 74 years - **every 12 months**, and can consider a dose every 6 months, based on a risk-benefit assessment.
- people aged 18 and over who are severely immunocompromised are **recommended** a COVID-19 vaccination **every 12 months**, and can **consider** a dose **every 6 months**, based on their individual health needs.

You don't have to wait 6 months between your last COVID-19 infection and having a COVID-19 vaccination.

Why are booster doses so important?

COVID-19 vaccines give protection against serious illness, hospitalisation and death, however this protection decreases over time. Evidence suggests that protection for people aged 65 years and older greatly increases with a COVID-19 vaccine every 6 months.

COVID-19 causes severe illness, hospitalisation and deaths in older people and those who are severely immunocompromised.

COVID-19 cases continue to occur in residential aged care homes. COVID-19 vaccines are voluntary but strongly encouraged for aged care residents.

Friends and family members

If you are a family member, loved one or are involved in decision making for an older person in aged care, we encourage you to support them to get a COVID-19 vaccine. All residential aged care providers can arrange COVID-19 vaccinations for residents who wish to receive one.

However, if you wish to organise this sooner, you may wish to take your loved one to a nearby GP or pharmacist to get their vaccination. It is important that residents are equally involved in the decision-making process for vaccination.

If you or others in your care belong to the following group, you can also consider getting a COVID-19 vaccination:

- People aged 18 to 64 years with severe immunocompromise are **recommended** a COVID-19 vaccination **every 12 months**, and can consider a dose **every 6 months**, based on their individual health needs.

How do I get a vaccination?

The Australian Government is supporting residential aged care homes to arrange COVID-19 vaccinations with local primary health care providers such as GPs and a pharmacist.

You can book an appointment now through the [Service Finder](#) which includes GPs and pharmacies.

Which vaccine should I get as a booster dose?

All currently available COVID-19 vaccines are anticipated to provide benefit, however ATAGI encourages bivalent mRNA vaccines over other vaccines.

COVID-19 and influenza

Both COVID-19 and influenza vaccination are free for eligible people and can be safely administered at the same time.

Managing the consent process

All residents in residential aged care must provide valid consent before receiving any vaccine, including a COVID-19 vaccine.

Aged care staff or the health professional giving the vaccine will talk to you or your substitute decision maker about whether you consent to be vaccinated. We encourage family members and

decision makers to discuss the benefits of a COVID-19 vaccine with their loved ones, GPs and aged care providers.

It is important for residential aged care homes, families, guardians and decision makers to accept the wishes of the resident.

If a resident or their family members have any questions about the risks and benefits of vaccination this can be discussed with the immunisation provider, treating GP or Nurse Practitioner.

Residential aged care homes are responsible for:

- arranging [consent](#)
- keeping a record of the consent and vaccination
- working with the vaccination provider to ensure the vaccination is updated in the Australian Immunisation Register.

Sometimes a guardian or substitute decision-maker needs to give consent for an aged care resident to get vaccinated. In such cases, they should follow the guardianship legislation in their state or territory. Some jurisdictions have special requirements for guardians or substitute decision makers consenting for another person.

More information about the role of guardians and other substitute decision makers is available from the [Older Persons Advocacy Network \(OPAN\)](#).

Where can I find information on my vaccination status?

There are two options for you to find information on your COVID-19 vaccinations:

- COVID-19 Digital Certificate
- your Immunisation History Statement.

You can access your Immunisation History Statement:

- by calling the Australian Immunisation Register enquiries line on 1800 653 809 (8am-5pm, Monday to Friday AEST) and asking them to send your statement to you. Please allow up to 14 days to receive your statement in the post
- by asking your doctor or vaccination provider to print a copy of your statement for you
- online, by setting up your own myGov account and then accessing your Medicare online account
- through the Express Plus Medicare mobile app.

More information

For more information on COVID-19 vaccinations, visit the [residents in aged care](#) page on the Department of Health and Aged Care website.

COVID-19 Antiviral Treatments

What are COVID-19 antivirals?

Lagevrio (molnupiravir) and Paxlovid (nirmatrelvir plus ritonavir) are two oral antiviral medicines that may help stop the COVID-19 infection from becoming severe, with both treatments having shown to reduce the chance of a person requiring admission to hospital for treatment and severe illness.

Lagevrio and Paxlovid are listed on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) and available from pharmacies with a prescription.

How do they work and how are they used?

You need to start oral antiviral treatments within 5 days of symptoms starting or testing positive for COVID-19.

If you are 70 years or older or at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19, it is important to speak to your GP about oral treatments before you get sick. You should then contact them for a script as soon as you test positive.

There are two COVID-19 oral antiviral treatments available for the treatment of COVID-19:

- nirmatrelvir and ritonavir (Paxlovid)
- molnupiravir (Lagevrio).

COVID-19 oral antivirals, taken as capsules or tablets, are used to assist in preventing COVID-19 infections from becoming severe, and are typically prescribed to individuals who are at higher risk for severe disease if they become infected with COVID-19.

Lagevrio capsules are taken twice a day for five days and should not be opened, broken or crushed. Where someone is unable to swallow capsules whole, they should consult with their treating GP to talk about a solution that is better suited.

Paxlovid tablets should be swallowed whole and not chewed, broken, or crushed. Where someone is unable to swallow tablets whole, they should talk with their GP about a solution that is better suited.

Who can get the treatments?

If you test positive to COVID-19, you may be eligible for COVID-19 oral antiviral treatments, if you are:

- 70 years of age or older regardless of risk factors and with or without symptoms
- 50 years of age or older with two additional risk factors for developing severe disease
- 30 years of age or older identifying as First Nations people with one risk factor for developing severe disease
- 18 years of age or older with moderate to severe immunocompromise or have been previously hospitalised from COVID-19 and subsequently re-infected.

How do you access COVID-19 antivirals?

Access to Lagevrio and Paxlovid requires a prescription from an authorised GP or Nurse Practitioner.

Timing is critical for COVID-19 antiviral treatments to be the most effective. People at higher risk of severe illness are eligible for antiviral treatments. We encourage you to have an early discussion with your GP or nurse practitioner about:

- whether an oral antiviral suits your health needs
- developing a COVID-19 plan if you test positive to COVID-19.

To find out if you are eligible for COVID-19 oral antivirals, see [eligibility for oral COVID-19 treatments](#).

If you test positive and haven't already made a plan with your GP or approved nurse practitioner, you should contact them as soon as possible.

If you don't have a regular GP, or can't get an appointment quickly, you can:

- call healthdirect's free helpline on 1800 022 222
- use the [healthdirect Service Finder](#) to search for one near you.

For people living in residential aged care, your aged care home will organise access to oral antivirals once prescribed by a GP.

Are there any side effects?

The most common side effects reported for Lagevrio include diarrhoea, nausea, and dizziness. Reported side effects for Paxlovid include changes in taste; diarrhoea; vomiting; and headache. You will be closely monitored for these side effects.

If you have any concerns about an adverse event, it is important to speak to a health professional. You can read more: [TGA reporting adverse events](#).

Who should NOT have the oral antiviral treatments?

Lagevrio is safe to use with other medications.

Paxlovid is not safe to use when it interacts with certain other medications for people with severe kidney or liver disease (more information can be found on the [TGA website](#)).

Clinical care teams will carefully review current medications and medical conditions to see if it is safe for you to use.

More information

For more information on COVID-19 oral antivirals, visit the [oral treatments for COVID-19](#) page on the Department of Health and Aged Care website.