Australian Government
Department of Health, Disability and Ageing

Infectious respiratory diseases: vaccination eligibility and access

Communication toolkit

This toolkit provides information and material to support you to communicate with your older community about vaccination eligibility and access, particularly those living in aged care.

Audience

- Older people, their families and carers
- Aged care residents
- Intermediaries of older people, such as GPs, pharmacists, nurse practitioners and allied health professionals.

Background

In winter, the risk and spread of common infectious respiratory diseases such as COVID-19 and influenza (flu) becomes greater.

This can be a dangerous time for older people, who are most at risk for severe illness from these diseases including hospitalisation or death. Aged care residents are particularly vulnerable because of their pre-existing health conditions, complex care needs and close living arrangements.

There are new variants and strains of COVID-19 and flu that continue to circulate. It's important older people are protected through regular vaccination before the peak of the winter season. Vaccination is still the best line of defence against severe illness.

Regular communication to older people, their families and carers is critical to ensure vaccination remains front of mind to minimise the health risks from respiratory infections.

What's in this toolkit

- Key messages
- Discussion guide
- Newsletter article
- Video download
- Social media post

Key messages

These messages may assist you to communicate with your community including aged care residents, their families and carers to help prevent the spread of infectious respiratory diseases.

Vaccination protection

- Vaccination helps protect older people from the serious impacts of respiratory infections, lessens symptoms and helps them recover faster.

- There are new strains or variants of COVID-19 and influenza (flu) that continue to circulate. That's why it's important for older people to get vaccinations regularly and before the peak of the winter season to be the most effective.

- All vaccines given in Australia are assessed to ensure they are safe and effective. Find more information on the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing website, health.gov.au, search 'vaccine safety'.

Who is eligible?

- A COVID-19 vaccine is recommended every 6 months for people aged 75 years and over.

- People aged 65 to 74 years or adults with compromised immunity are recommended a COVID-19 vaccination every 12 months. They are eligible for a dose every 6 months, after talking to a healthcare provider.

- Adults aged 65 years and over are eligible for annual COVID-19 and flu vaccinations.

- It's safe to get the COVID-19 and flu vaccines on the same day, you don't have to book multiple appointments.

How to access vaccinations

- People aged 65 years and older can access vaccinations through their GP, pharmacist, community health centre or Aboriginal health service.

- Residential aged care providers are responsible for making vaccinations, such as COVID-19 and flu, accessible to their residents.

- If you have a family member, friend or loved one living or working in an aged care home, please help them to get their COVID-19 and flu vaccine now, before the peak of the winter season.

Aged care residents

- Residents in aged care should ask a worker or manager at their home to arrange for a pharmacist or GP to come and vaccinate them from the comfort of their aged care home. Aged care providers can also make arrangements for residents to attend a GP or other health service to receive their vaccination.

- Aged care residents are particularly vulnerable to severe illness from respiratory infections like COVID-19 and flu because of their age and health care needs. Outbreaks in an aged care home carries significant health impacts for residents, who may require hospitalisation.

- Vaccination rates for COVID-19 in residential aged care are low. COVID-19 and flu remains a very real risk for older people, and we must do all we can to protect them.

- Older age is one of the biggest risk factors for serious health issues from infectious respiratory diseases such as COVID-19 and flu.
- Regular vaccination is the best way to reduce the risks of serious illness, hospitalisation or death from vaccine-preventable respiratory infections.
- Vaccination is a safe and effective way to protect yourself from common respiratory illnesses.

Call to action

- Older people should talk to their GP or healthcare worker or find a health service on **healthdirect.gov.au**, to book their vaccination today.
- Find out more at: **myagedcare.gov.au/protect-from-infection**.

Discussion guide

Why do I need to get a vaccine?

The risk and spread of common infectious respiratory diseases such as COVID-19 and influenza (flu) become greater heading into the winter season.

There are new variants and strains of COVID-19 and flu that continue to circulate which is why it's important older people who are at high risk of severe illness are protected through regular vaccination.

Those who are more vulnerable, such as older people, need to have COVID-19 and flu vaccines regularly to protect against new strains of these viruses as they arise.

It's important to keep up-to-date with vaccinations throughout the year and get your recommended doses as soon as you're eligible.

How often should I get a vaccine?

A COVID-19 vaccination is recommended every 6 months for people aged 75 years and over.

People aged 65 to 74 years (or those with compromised immunity) are recommended to have a COVID-19 dose every 12 months. They are eligible for a dose every 6 months, following discussion with a healthcare provider.

All adults aged 65 years and older are eligible for annual COVID-19 and flu vaccines.

It's safe to get the COVID-19 and flu vaccines on the same day.

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

How do I get a vaccine?

You can get vaccinations from your GP, pharmacist or nurse practitioner, local community health clinic or Aboriginal health service.

Some vaccines, like for COVID-19, are free for people aged 65 and over.

Influenza vaccines are free for eligible people aged 65 and over through the National Immunisation Program.

You can find out about your vaccine eligibility or find a health service at healthdirect.gov.au or call 1800 022 222 if you need advice.

What are the side effects of vaccines?

You may experience a sore arm from any vaccination.

Common side effects of COVID-19 vaccination include a headache, fatigue or fever and chills. Symptoms are generally mild and often do not last more than 24 hours.

Common side effects of influenza vaccines include drowsiness or tiredness, muscle aches, pain, redness and swelling at injection site or mild fever. Most reactions are mild and only last a couple of days and you will recover without any problems.

If you are concerned about vaccine side effects, speak to your GP or other health professional before getting vaccinated.

See healthdirect.gov.au and search for 'vaccine side effects' for detailed information.

Are vaccines safe to use in older people?

All vaccines available in Australia have been assessed and approved by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) following a rigorous evaluation process to make sure they are safe and effective.

Adverse reactions from vaccinations are rare and the benefits of vaccination overall far outweigh any risks. There is strong evidence that vaccines can help prevent serious illness and health complications. Severe disease from infection with COVID-19 and flu is greater in vulnerable people who are unvaccinated.

Find more information on vaccine safety on the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing website, health.gov.au search 'vaccine safety'.

You can talk to your GP, pharmacist or nurse practitioner about your vaccine options and ask questions if you have concerns.

What should I do if I get COVID-19?

Older people are advised to take oral antiviral treatments as soon as possible after getting COVID-19 symptoms, at least within 5 days.

Oral antivirals may help prevent COVID-19 from becoming severe.

Early assessment and planning for anitiviral treatment is essential.

Talk to your GP,nurse practitioner or aged care provider to find out whether antiviral treatments are right for you.

Where can I find information about vaccination?

You can find information about vaccinations and book an appointment using the health service finder at healthdirect.gov.au/australian-health-services or call 1800 022 222 if you need advice.

Newsletter item

Guidance

This content may be used in your newsletter.

Get ahead of COVID-19 and flu this winter

Winter is the peak season for the spread of common respiratory infections like COVID-19 and flu. This can be a deadly time for you, especially if you live in aged care. You can get seriously ill, need hospital care or even die from these diseases. There are new variants and strains of COVID-19 and flu that contine to circulate.

Get a free COVID-19 vaccine every:

- 6 months if you are aged 75 years or older
- 12 months if you are aged 65 to 74 years, or 6 months after talking to a health care provider.

Get a flu vaccine every 12 months.

You can get both COVID-19 and flu vaccines at the same time, so you don't need multiple appointments.

Regular vaccinations are the best defence to combat new strains and protect against severe illness.

Get vaccinated today

Book vaccinations before the peak of the winter season through your:

- GP or pharmacist
- local community health centre
- Aboriginal health service.

Find a health service at **healthdirect.gov.au** or call 1800 022 222.

Read more information at **myagedcare.gov.au/protect-from-infection**

Aged care residents

COVID-19 and flu remains a very real risk for those living in residential aged care.

Outbreaks in an aged care home can lead to significant consequences for residents, who might need to go to hospital. Vaccines are a safe and effective way to protect yourself from these diseases.

You can get vaccinated from the comfort of your aged care home. Ask a worker or manager at your aged care home to arrange for a pharmacist or GP to come and visit.

Video download

Share and downlad this video with an Aged Care Council of Elders member to use on your news and social channels: https://youtu.be/6s4oNnwIPpo?si=oQRR7PJen5-c1nIY

Social media posts

Guidance

This content is suggested for use on your social media channels.

Facebook

Winter is the peak season for the spread of respiratory infections like COVID-19 and flu - book in for your vaccination today.

New variants and strains of these diseases continue to circulate, so older people need regular vaccinations for them to be the most effective.

Get a COVID-19 vaccine every:

- 6 months if you're aged 75 years or older
- 12 months if you're aged 65 to 74 years, or every 6 months after talking to your health care provider.

Adults eligible aged 65 and over can get free annual COVID-19 and flu vaccinations. It's safe to get the both vaccines on the same day.

Book a vaccination today through your:

- GP or pharmacist
- local community health centre
- Aboriginal health service.

Find out more at: **myagedcare.gov.au/protect-from-infection**

Instagram

With winter upon us get your free COVID-19 and flu vaccine, book in for a vaccination today.

There are new strains that continue to circulate, so it's important you are vaccinated regularly to reduce the serious health risks.

Get a COVID-19 vaccine every:

- 6 months if you're aged 75 years and over
- 12 months if you're aged 65 to 74 years, or every 6 months after talking with a health care provider.

Book in for COVID-19 and flu vaccination today through:

- your GP or pharmacist
- community health centre
- Aboriginal health service.

Click the link in our bio to find out more.

Link: myagedcare.gov.au/protect-from-infection

X (Twitter)

Winter is a deadly season for COVID-19 and flu – book a vaccine today.

Get a COVID-19 vaccine every 6 months if you're 75+ and 12 months if aged 65 to 74 or every 6 months after speaking to a GP.

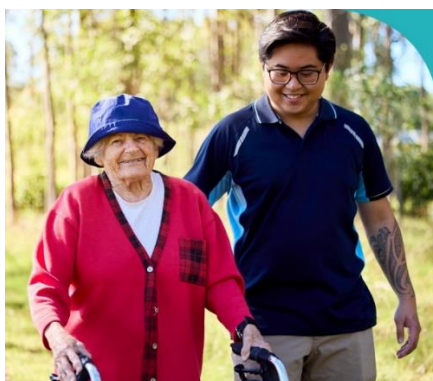Book vaccinations through your GP, pharmacist or local community health centre.

Find out more at: **myagedcare.gov.au/protect-from-infection**

Social media tiles

Download these tiles to use individually or as an image carousal on your social media posts.
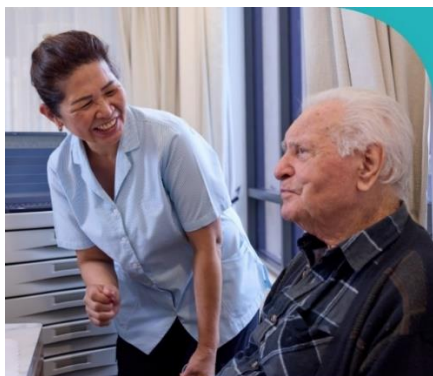
Book your vaccination ahead of the winter peak – talk to your health provider today.

Vaccination is the best defence against serious illness – book yours today.

Protect yourself and community from infection – book a vaccine today.