

COVID-19 vaccine NIP transition

health.gov.au/immunisation

From 1 October 2026, COVID-19 vaccines will be available for free through the National Immunisation Program (NIP) for eligible people at higher risk of severe illness. This fact sheet explains who can get a free COVID-19 vaccine, why eligibility is changing, and where to get vaccinated.

Who can get a free COVID-19 vaccine from 1 October 2026?

From 1 October 2026, COVID-19 vaccines will be free under the NIP for eligible people who are at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19. This includes:

- all adults aged 75 years and over (two free doses per year, given around six months apart)
- adults aged 65–74 years (one free dose per year)
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 50–74 years (one free dose per year)
- adults aged 18–64 years with a severely compromised immune system (one free dose per year) – speak to your immunisation provider for advice on which conditions are included.

If you are not eligible for a free COVID-19 vaccine through the NIP, getting vaccinated may still be helpful and you can choose to purchase the vaccine privately. Talk to your health professional about the benefits and risks for your individual situation.

Why will free COVID-19 vaccines be available only for some groups?

During the COVID-19 pandemic, COVID-19 vaccines were free for everyone in Australia as part of the national pandemic response to help protect people from a newly emerging disease.

Since then, many people in Australia have received COVID-19 vaccines or have experienced COVID-19 infection. This has helped build a level of widespread protection across the community. The virus that causes COVID-19 has also changed over time, with new variants (strains) affecting how it impacts people. More recent variants have generally been associated with milder disease.

Now that COVID-19 vaccines are moving to the routine NIP schedule, they will be free to those most at risk of serious illness.

Where to get the COVID-19 vaccine

Vaccination appointments can be booked at a range of health services including:

- doctors or general practices
- local council immunisation clinics (available in some states and territories)
- community health centres
- Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander health services
- participating pharmacies.

While NIP vaccines are free for eligible people, vaccination providers may charge a consultation or administration fee for the visit.

What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is an illness caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. It spreads easily from person to person through:

- direct contact, such as sharing saliva
- air when people breathe, talk, cough or sneeze
- contaminated surfaces which people touch and then touch their mouth, nose or eyes.

Most people who catch COVID-19 get mild common cold-like symptoms like a runny nose, sore throat, cough and headache. These symptoms usually get better on their own after about a week. However, COVID-19 still causes many hospitalisations and deaths in Australia each year.

Older adults, including older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and people with certain medical conditions are at higher risk of becoming very sick and may need hospital care.

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Information for consumers



How to protect against COVID-19 using vaccines

The COVID-19 vaccine is a safe and effective way to help protect people from becoming very sick, needing to go to hospital, or dying from COVID-19. If you're over 65 years of age, having a recent COVID-19 vaccine halves your risk of dying from COVID-19 compared to having it over a year ago.

The vaccine is given as an injection, usually in the upper arm. COVID-19 vaccines used in Australia are carefully checked to make sure they are safe and effective and continually monitored once they are in use. COVID-19 vaccines are regularly updated to protect against newer variants of the virus to give you the best possible protection.

What are the side effects of the COVID-19 vaccine?

Side effects from COVID-19 vaccines are generally mild and go away after a few days.

Common side effects for a COVID-19 vaccination include:

- a sore arm
- headache
- muscle aches
- tiredness
- fever.

Serious side effects are very rare. These can include allergic reactions (anaphylaxis) and inflammation of the heart or the lining around the heart (myocarditis or pericarditis). The benefits of COVID-19 vaccination in preventing severe illness and death, particularly in people at higher risk, far outweigh the very rare risk of serious side effects.

People should talk to a health professional before getting a COVID-19 vaccine if they:

- have had anaphylaxis after a previous COVID-19 vaccine, or
- have certain heart conditions, such as myocarditis or pericarditis in the past 3 months, acute rheumatic fever affecting the heart, or severe heart failure.

Can COVID-19 vaccines be given with other recommended vaccines?

COVID-19 vaccines can be given at the same time as other vaccines, including the flu, pneumococcal, RSV or shingles vaccine.

Vaccination records

Vaccination providers must record immunisations on the Australian Immunisation Register (AIR) to ensure there is an accurate record of all vaccines given.

People can get a copy of their Immunisation History Statement by:

- going to my.gov.au and signing in to access your Medicare online account or using the myGov mobile app
- calling Services Australia on 1800 653 809 to request a copy
- asking a vaccination provider to print a copy.

Where to get more information

For more information

Talk to a health professional

Visit health.gov.au/immunisation

Visit skai.org.au – SKAI (Sharing Knowledge About Immunisation) provides evidence-based answers to your questions about immunisation.

All information in this fact sheet is correct as of September 2026.