

COVID-19 vaccine NIP transition

About this kit

From 1 October 2026, COVID-19 vaccines will transition to the National Immunisation Program (NIP). This will replace the stand-alone National COVID-19 Vaccine Program established during Australia's COVID-19 pandemic response.

This kit is designed to help health professionals have clear, confident and informed conversations with patients about COVID-19 vaccination. It includes simple key messages, suggested words for conversations, answers to common questions, and ready-to-publish content for practice newsletters and social media channels.

Remember: A strong recommendation from a trusted health professional can help patients understand their risk, feel reassured about vaccine safety, and make an informed decision about vaccination.

Key messages for health professionals

- **COVID-19 is still with us.** For many people it can cause illness, but it can still lead to severe disease, hospitalisation and serious complications, particularly for older adults, older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults, and people with severe immunocompromise or certain medical risk conditions.
- **Vaccination helps maintain protection.** Protection from COVID-19 vaccination decreases over time. Regular vaccination helps reduce the risk of severe illness, hospitalisation and serious complications.
- **The vaccination program is becoming more targeted.** From 1 October 2026, COVID-19 vaccines will move to the National Immunisation Program, with free vaccines available for people at highest risk of severe disease.
- **Eligibility is changing, not the importance of vaccination.** Free NIP-funded doses will be available for adults aged 65 years and over, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 50–74 years, and adults aged 18–64 years with severe immunocompromise.
- **Patients who are not eligible for a free COVID-19 vaccine may still benefit.** People who are not eligible for a free NIP-funded vaccine may choose to purchase a vaccine privately after a benefit-risk discussion with their health professional.
- **Health professionals make the recommendations personal.** The most useful message is one that links COVID-19 vaccination to the patient's age, health conditions, previous vaccination history and individual risk.

More information

Read more about the [transition of COVID-19 vaccines to the NIP](#).

Discussing vaccination with patients

When talking with patients about vaccination, health professionals should be prepared to have respectful, informed, and patient-centred conversations. Effective discussions help build trust, support informed decision making, and improve vaccination uptake.

Vaccination providers should be ready to:

- Explain the benefits and risks of COVID-19 vaccination in plain language, including who vaccine is recommended for, how the vaccine works, and the likelihood of side effects.
- Discuss why yearly vaccination may be recommended, such as changes in circulating strains, waning immunity, or increased risk at certain life stages or health conditions.
- Address questions and concerns about side effects, vaccine safety, and effectiveness, acknowledging patient worries and responding with evidence-based information.
- Tailor conversations to the patient's needs, values, and health circumstances, using an empathetic and non-judgemental approach.

The [Sharing Knowledge About Immunisation \(SKAI\)](#) website provides practical tools and discussion guides to support health professionals in having confident, respectful vaccination conversations, particularly with people who are hesitant or have concerns.

Providers are encouraged to use these resources to strengthen their vaccination discussions and support informed patient choices.

Tips for conversations with patients and carers

Start with awareness: “COVID-19 is still circulating in the community and although new variants may be milder, it still causes many hospitalisations and deaths in Australia each year.”

Reassure without dismissing concerns: “It’s completely reasonable to have questions. Let’s go through what has changed, what has stayed the same, and what the recommendation means for you personally.”

Explain the changes simply: “The vaccine is moving from a pandemic program to the National Immunisation Program. That means free doses will now be available for people with the highest risk of severe COVID-19.”

Make a clear recommendation: “Based on your age and circumstances, I recommend you have a COVID-19 vaccine to help maintain your protection.”

Frequently asked questions from patients and carers

Patient question	Suggested responses health professionals can use
Do I still need a COVID-19 vaccine?	- COVID-19 is still circulating, and your risk depends on your age, health conditions and immune function. - 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. - For people at higher risk, regular vaccination is still the best way to reduce the chance of severe illness, hospitalisation or death.
Why has free access changed?	- During the pandemic, COVID-19 vaccines were made widely available as part of the emergency response to help protect people against a newly emerging disease. - Since then, many people in Australia have received COVID-19 vaccines and/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. Now the program is moving into routine arrangements, free vaccines will be targeted to the people most at risk of serious illness.
Am I eligible for a free vaccine?	From 1 October 2026, free COVID-19 vaccines under the NIP will be available for people in higher-risk groups, including older adults aged 65 years and over, older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 50 years and over, and adults with severe immunocompromise aged 18 years and over.
Where can I get a COVID-19 vaccine?	- Vaccination appointments may be available through doctors or general practices, participating pharmacies, Aboriginal health services, community health centres and some local council immunisation clinics. - Although the vaccine is free through the NIP, vaccination providers may charge a consultation or administration fee.
What if I'm not eligible for a free vaccine?	- If you are not eligible for a free COVID-19 vaccine through the NIP, getting vaccinated may still be helpful depending on your age and underlying health conditions. - You may still choose to purchase a COVID-19 vaccine privately, just like flu vaccines.
Are COVID-19 vaccines safe?	- COVID-19 vaccines used in Australia are carefully assessed before they are approved for use and continue to be monitored. - Most side effects are generally mild and go away after a few days. Serious side effects are very rare. Common side effects for a COVID-19 vaccination include a sore arm, tiredness or headache, fever and muscle aches.
Can I have it with my flu vaccine or other vaccines?	Yes, COVID-19 vaccines can be given at the same time as other recommended vaccines, including the flu, pneumococcal, RSV or shingles vaccine.

COVID-19 information and resources for health professionals

Resource	Details
COVID-19 vaccines update for immunisation providers Program advice for health professionals ATAGI statement on the administration of COVID-19 vaccines Australian Immunisation Handbook COVID-19 chapter* AusVaxSafety COVID-19 vaccine safety data COVID-19 vaccine webpage* Consumer factsheet COVID-19 vaccines: Frequently asked questions (FAQs)	- Information about the transition of COVID-19 vaccines to the NIP. - Details on eligibility, clinical considerations, reporting and operational requirements. - Advice regarding the administration of COVID-19 vaccines in 2026. - Clinical recommendations, contraindications, precautions and dosing information. - Data on the short-term safety profile of COVID-19 vaccines and commonly reported adverse events after vaccination. - Information about the free COVID-19 vaccine on the NIP, including who can get it, how it's given, and possible side effects. - Information for patients to explain who can get a free vaccine and why eligibility is changing. - Evidence-based answers to common questions about COVID-19 vaccines.
* Please note: COVID-19 changes for these resources will take effect on 1 October 2026.	

General NIP resources for health professionals

Resource	Details
National Immunisation Program webpage National Immunisation Program schedule* The Australian Immunisation Handbook State and territory immunisation contacts Adult vaccinations brochure* NIP Updates Co-administration of vaccines for adults: a guide for immunisation providers SKAI - Resources for health professionals	- Information and resources for health professionals and consumers about the NIP, the free vaccines available, and eligibility requirements. - Recommended vaccines and schedule points for different cohorts under the NIP. - Authoritative clinical guidance on vaccine recommendations, contraindications, precautions, and co-administration advice. - Contacts for jurisdiction-specific ordering, delivery, reporting, and program support. - Information for consumers about recommended vaccines available for free for adults under the NIP. - Subscription service to receive email updates about immunisation program changes and guidance. - NCIRS practical guidance to support vaccine co-administration in adult populations. - Evidence-based tools and discussion guides to support effective vaccination conversations with patients.
* Please note: COVID-19 changes for these resources will take effect on 1 October 2026.	

Promotion resources for health professionals

Newsletter article

COVID-19 vaccine changes from 1 October 2026

We'd like to let our patients know about some upcoming changes to COVID-19 vaccination arrangements.

From 1 October 2026, COVID-19 vaccines will be available for free through the National Immunisation Program (NIP) for people who are at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19. This includes older people, older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and adults with severe immunocompromise.

If you're not eligible for a free COVID-19 vaccine under the NIP, you may still choose to purchase a vaccine privately. Our team can help you understand your options and whether a COVID-19 vaccination is recommended based on your age, health conditions and individual circumstances.

If you have any questions, please speak with your doctor or another member of our healthcare team.

For more information about COVID-19 vaccination, visit **health.gov.au/immunisation**.

Email to eligible patients

Subject: You may be eligible for a free COVID-19 vaccine

Dear [Patient Name],

We're contacting you because you may be eligible for a free COVID-19 vaccine from 1 October 2026 under the National Immunisation Program (NIP).

COVID-19 can still cause serious illness, particularly in older adults and people with certain health conditions. Staying up to date with recommended vaccinations remains the best way to protect yourself and reduce your risk of severe disease.

Based on our records, you may be eligible for a free COVID-19 vaccine. We encourage you to speak with your doctor or another member of our healthcare team about whether a COVID-19 vaccination is recommended for you.

To book an appointment or discuss your options, please contact our practice on [phone number or email].

For more information about COVID-19 vaccination, visit **health.gov.au/immunisation**.

Kind regards,

[Practice Name]
[Contact Details]

Ready-to-publish social media posts

The posts below are written for health professionals and general practices to copy and publish on their own social media accounts. They can be used with practice branding, a clinic image, or a simple vaccination reminder graphic.

Theme	Ready-to-publish posts
General awareness	 Is it time for your COVID-19 vaccination? COVID-19 is still circulating in our community, and for some people it can lead to serious illness. If you're an older adult, have a weakened immune system, or live with certain health conditions, staying up to date with recommended COVID-19 vaccinations can help protect you from severe disease. Not sure if you're due for a COVID-19 vaccine? We're here to help.  Book an appointment with our team to discuss what's recommended for you.
NIP transition	 Changes to COVID-19 vaccines from 1 October 2026 From 1 October 2026, COVID-19 vaccines will be available through the National Immunisation Program (NIP) for people at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19. This includes many older Australians, older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and adults with severe immunocompromise. If you're unsure what these changes mean for you or your family, talk to our team. We can provide personalised advice based on your health needs.  Contact us today to book an appointment or ask a question.
Eligibility reminder	 Can you get a free COVID-19 vaccine? Wondering whether you're eligible for a free COVID-19 vaccine through the National Immunisation Program (NIP) from 1 October 2026? Eligibility will depend on factors such as your age or medical conditions. Our healthcare team can help you understand whether a COVID-19 vaccine is recommended for you and whether you qualify for a funded dose. Don't leave it to guesswork.  Give us a call or book an appointment to discuss your options.
Risk-based recommendation	 Is COVID-19 vaccination recommended for you? Everyone's health needs are different. Your age, medical conditions, immune function, and how long it's been since your last COVID-19 vaccination or infection can all influence what's recommended for you. If you're at higher risk of severe illness, staying up to date with COVID-19 vaccination offers important protection.  Talk with one of our doctors to get advice tailored to your circumstances.  Book your appointment today.

Co-administration of recommended vaccines	 Planning your vaccinations? Did you know that COVID-19 vaccines can be given at the same time as other recommended vaccines, including flu, pneumococcal, RSV and shingles vaccines? If you're planning your healthcare for the year ahead, it's a great opportunity to check whether you're up to date with all your recommended vaccinations. Our team can help you plan your vaccinations.  Contact the practice to book an appointment or discuss vaccines recommended for you.
Appointment call to action	 Are you at higher risk from COVID-19? If you're aged 65 years or over, an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person aged 50 years or over, or have severe immunocompromise, now is a good time to check whether a COVID-19 vaccine is recommended for you. We're here to answer your questions and help you make informed decisions about your health.  Book an appointment with our team to discuss if a COVID-19 vaccination is recommended for you.