



Australian Government

COVID-19 vaccines common questions

This document contains common questions and answers about the COVID-19 vaccines.

Vaccines-related questions

Q. Why should I get a COVID-19 vaccine?

A. A vaccine is a safe and effective way to protect people against serious illness from COVID-19. Just like the flu, it is important to get vaccinated to protect yourself, family, community and Elders.

Vaccines are a safe way of producing an immune response in the body without causing illness. Vaccines contain either killed or weakened versions of the virus that causes disease or only a small part of the virus (such as a protein or RNA).

Q. Are there any known side-effects for any of the COVID-19 vaccines? What are expected (normal) side-effects? What should I do and where should I go if my side-effects are more severe than that? Will the known side-effects be registered anywhere?

A. As part of the vaccine assessment, the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) looks at information about any side effects. For the vaccine to be approved in Australia, the benefit must be greater than the risk. All vaccines can have some side effects. These usually don't last long and are mild.

Clinical trials of COVID-19 vaccines have shown side effects that didn't last long. These were typical of vaccines, such as pain at the injection site, fever or muscle aches and headaches.

Information on the side effects of any vaccine approved for use in Australia is available in the Consumer Medicines Information leaflet. It is available on the TGA website at: www.tga.gov.au, just search for 'Consumer Medicines Information'.

If you have any questions or worries after your vaccinations, just contact your vaccinating or local health professional. They can advise you about what to do in the unlikely event of an unexpected or more severe reaction to the vaccine.

COVID-19
VACCINATION

Safe. Effective. Free.

health.gov.au/covid19-vaccines

All information in this document is
correct as at 12 February 2021

Q. Can I choose not to be vaccinated?

A. Yes. The COVID-19 vaccination is voluntary. It is encouraged to protect yourself, Elders and community from COVID-19.

Q. Who can I contact if I have questions about the COVID-19 vaccines?

A. You can learn more at the Department of Health's [COVID-19 vaccine information hub](#). You can also subscribe to the [COVID-19 Vaccines Update](#). If you would like to talk to someone, please call National Coronavirus Helpline that operates 24/7, 1800 020 080 or talk to your local healthcare professional.

Vaccine priority groups

Q. Who is getting the vaccine first?

A.

- People who have an increased risk of developing serious illness or dying from COVID-19
- People at an increased risk of exposure, infection and spreading of COVID-19
- People who are in a setting with high potential to spread the virus, such as health and aged care workers
- People working in critical services, such as emergency service workers.

All Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults are a priority group. They will be among the first that can get the vaccine after the above mentioned groups.

Q. How was it decided who the priority groups for vaccines are? Why are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples a priority group for the COVID-19 vaccine?

A. The Australian Government has been advised by medical experts about the priority groups. Based on their advice, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have been identified as a priority group. This is because there is a higher risk of getting and developing serious illness from COVID-19 due to a number of factors. This may include a higher rate of chronic health conditions and in some cases crowded-living conditions, which increases the risk of spreading the infection.

Q. Which vaccine are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults receiving?

A. On Monday 25 January, the Government announced provisional approval of the Pfizer/BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine for use in Australia. This vaccine will be managed through 30 to 50 key hospitals across urban and rural Australia.

Provisional approval of the University of Oxford/AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine is expected in the coming weeks. This vaccine will be distributed through more sites, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Health Services, general practice clinics, existing Commonwealth GP respiratory clinics, state-run vaccination clinics and pharmacies.

People will need to receive two doses of the same vaccine. However which vaccine is given will depend on location and availability.

Access

Q. Will everyone have access to the vaccine if they would like to receive it – even if they live in remote areas?

A. Yes, the approved vaccines will be accessible to everyone in Australia. For some groups, such as children and pregnant women, we need to wait for further trials. These trials will confirm safety of the vaccine before it becomes available to them.

The Australian Government is working closely with State and Territory Governments and the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO) to ensure the vaccine is easily accessible to everyone.

There will be many sites across Australia where the vaccine will be available. A lot of them will be in rural and remote locations. This includes sites such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Health Services, GP-led Respiratory clinics, GPs or state/territory health services/clinics or pharmacies.

If there are several locations close to you, you may be able to choose. For example, this can be an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Health Service, a GP clinic or community pharmacy.

Q. I've heard that the vaccine has to be kept at a very cold temperature to work. How are you planning to safely transport it to remote communities?

A. The Australian Government Department of Health is working with transport companies to ensure the safe delivery of the vaccines as a priority. This includes using refrigerated vehicles and specialised equipment to keep the vaccine at the right temperature.

The Pfizer/BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine will be managed through 30 to 50 key hospitals across urban and rural Australia, because it needs very cold storage. The AstraZeneca vaccine only requires the same refrigeration as other vaccines, such as the fluvax, making it easier to transport to remote communities.

Vaccine safety and efficacy

Q. Who approves the COVID-19 vaccines and what is the process?

A. The Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) assesses all COVID-19 vaccines for quality, safety and efficacy. This is the same process that all vaccines go through in Australia.

Medical and scientific experts within the TGA continuously assess the vaccine. This is done by using data from clinical trials and countries who are already using the vaccine. They will also use new data collected during the vaccination process in Australia. The main goal is to ensure it will protect people from COVID-19 infections (efficacy) without causing serious side effects (safety).

The vaccine must show a high level of quality, safety and efficacy before it will be approved by the TGA and made available in Australia.

You can find out more about the TGA's approval process at <https://www.tga.gov.au/covid-19-vaccines>.

Q. Should pregnant women or children get vaccinated?

A. The Pfizer/BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine has been provisionally approved for use in Australia for people over 16 years. Additional data is needed to support the use of a vaccine in children and young people under 16 for the Pfizer vaccine, and for under 18 for the AstraZeneca vaccine, if it gets TGA approval.

Clinical trials for new medicines do not usually include pregnant or breastfeeding women. In preparation for vaccine roll-out, the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) is currently finalising clinical advice for health care providers on the use of COVID-19 vaccines in Australia in 2021. This is likely to include advice for pregnant women. This advice will be provided as soon as it is received.

Q. How can you make a vaccine so quickly?

A. Safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines have been able to be developed faster than any other vaccine because of several reasons:

- a level of funding not seen before;
- the availability of new technology; and
- researchers and developers around the world working together.

Some steps of the clinical trials and approval processes have been done at the same time instead of one after the other. As soon as the preliminary data was available the trials were able to progress. This has given us access to the vaccine as quickly as possible.

Q. How effective is the vaccine?

A. The Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) assesses potential COVID-19 vaccines to ensure approved vaccines are safe and effective. The data on how effective the vaccines will be at preventing the spread of COVID-19, and how long immunity will last, will be received in the coming months.

Q. What happens if I don't take my second dose or if I am late for it?

A. It is likely that all COVID-19 vaccines available in Australia will require two separate doses. For best protection, these doses should be a few weeks apart. It is important that every person receives the full two doses of the same vaccine.

COVID-19

Q. Who can get COVID-19?

A. Anyone can get COVID-19. The elderly and people with chronic conditions such as heart disease and diabetes are most at risk of serious COVID-19 infections.

Luckily, thanks to the communities' hard work, numbers have been very low for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with no deaths. However, there has still been 151 cases so far.

Q. How serious is COVID-19?

A. Thousands of people around the world are dying of COVID-19 every day. Since the beginning of pandemic more than 2 million people have died. There have been more than 100 million cases of COVID-19 around the world.

Fortunately, in Australia we have been able to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and have not experienced the same impact as other countries. Sadly, there has still been 909 deaths as a result of COVID-19 in Australia.