



Australian Government



# Disability Provider Alert

17 February 2021

For DSS, NDIA and NDIS disability provider channels (please adapt text for your channels as required).

## COVID-19 Vaccine roll-out update

People with disability, workers and supporters eligible under Phase 1a of the roll-out include:

- A person with disability living in residential accommodation (in settings with two or more people with disability only).
- A paid worker providing support to people living in residential accommodation with two more people with disability.

The Department of Health has published a [dedicated web page for people with disability](#). This page will be regularly updated as more details are confirmed.

The COVID-19 vaccine is free and voluntary.

The Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) has developed a [collection of resources](#) to help health professionals, providers and people receiving the vaccination in providing informed consent.

On 16 February, the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) approved the [AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine](#) for use in Australia.

Information about the roll-out is currently being developed into accessible formats such as Easy Read and Auslan and will be made available as soon as possible. Other stakeholder resources such as posters and social media content is also being developed.

## Phase 1a: people with disability in residential accommodation

Commencing from Monday 22 February



A small number of sites across Australia have been identified by the Department of Health as the first locations to receive Phase 1a vaccinations. The Department of Health will contact these initial sites and work closely with the providers.

The Department of Health will continue to consult closely with key sector representatives to ensure the Phase 1a roll-out for people with disability is safe and fit-for-purpose.

For all providers (even if you have not been contacted yet) with people with disability or workers eligible for Phase 1a, we strongly recommend that you:

1. Start conversations to ensure everyone is informed about the priority roll-out and understands the vaccination program
2. Review the [ATAGI consent pack](#) and start discussions with people with disability or substitute decision makers about consent as soon as possible. Additional resources will be available soon for people with disability to support consent.

## COVID-19 Vaccines Implementation Plan for the Disability Sector

The Department of Health has developed an implementation plan for the disability sector in consultation with state and territory governments, key disability stakeholders and other Commonwealth departments and agencies.

Implementation plans have also been developed for Aged Care, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Australians.

These implementation plans will be published on the Department of Health website shortly.

## FAQs from sector consultation

The Department of Health has provided the following questions and answers following sector consultation. These can be used to answer any questions you may receive from clients or to develop your own website and newsletter content.

### Phase 1a

**Is eligibility for Phase 1a limited to people who are National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) participants?**

No.

**I live alone but my carer works in residential settings with more than two people. Am I eligible to receive the vaccine in Phase 1a?**

No. People with disability who live in residential supported accommodation with two or more people will be eligible to receive the vaccine in Phase 1a.

**Is it mandatory to receive a vaccine in Phase 1a if I am eligible?**

No. The COVID-19 vaccine will be voluntary.

**If I am eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine in Phase 1a but take a while to decide if I want to receive it, will I be able to receive the vaccine at a later stage?**

Yes. Should an eligible individual decline the vaccine in Phase 1a, they will remain eligible to access the vaccination at a later date.

**Is there a limit to the size of the residential setting included in Phase 1a?**

Residential settings with **two or more** people with disability will be included in Phase 1a.

**Will the Commonwealth or state and territory governments be contacting services/providers to schedule for vaccinations?**

For the majority of areas, the Commonwealth will work with a contracted workforce provider to contact disability services and providers to schedule vaccinations in Phase 1a. There are some regions where State and Territory governments will manage this correspondence directly.

**If I am eligible to receive the vaccine in Phase 1a but do not have an underlying medical condition identified by the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI), can I still receive the vaccine?**

Yes. The underlying medical conditions identified by ATAGI are relevant for Phase 1b of the vaccine roll-out.

**How will people with disability be identified or enrolled to receive the vaccine in Phase 1a?**

The Department of Health is working with a number of stakeholders, including the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA), the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission (NDIS Commission), state and territory governments and other organisations to identify and reach out to people with disability. For Phase 1a, people with disability will be notified when it is their turn to receive a COVID-19 vaccination.

**Will staff who do not provide direct care in a residential setting be eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine in Phase 1a?**

Yes. Any paid staff who work in a supported residential setting with two or more people with disability will be eligible to receive the vaccine in Phase 1a.

## Phase 1b

**What is classified as an underlying condition?**

[ATAGI's advice to Government on priority population groups for COVID-19 vaccination](#) is available via the Commonwealth Department of Health's website. These include, but are not limited to, immunocompromised, multiple comorbidities, chronic lung disease, diabetes, cardiovascular disease and severe obesity.

**Is the list of underlying conditions final or will it be updated?**

ATAGI is continually reviewing data and evidence for vaccines and may update its advice to Government as new information becomes available.

**What if I am eligible to receive the vaccine in Phase 1b but am unable to go to a location to receive the vaccine?**

This will be assessed on a case by case basis.

**Can people under the age of 18 receive the COVID-19 vaccine in Phase 1b if they have an underlying medical condition?**

No.

**What age group is classified as younger adults with an underlying medical condition in Phase 1b?**

People aged 18-69 are classified as younger adults.

## **COVID-19 vaccines**

**Where can I access information on the COVID-19 vaccine?**

Please visit the Department of Health vaccine website at [www.health.gov.au/covid19-vaccines](http://www.health.gov.au/covid19-vaccines). Information on the site will be updated regularly as new information becomes available. Resources for people with disability will also be provided and updated.

**Have certain vaccines been earmarked for people with disability?**

No. A priority approach will be taken depending on what vaccine is registered and available first.

**Can I use funds from my NDIS plan to cover the cost of the COVID-19 vaccine?**

COVID-19 vaccines are free for everyone in Australia.

**What is the timing between doses of the Pfizer vaccine?**

Two doses will be required, administered at least 21 days apart.

**Can I get the COVID-19 and the annual influenza (flu) vaccine?**

Routine scheduling and giving a flu vaccine with a COVID-19 vaccine on the same day is not recommended. The preferred minimum interval between a dose of seasonal flu vaccine and a dose of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine is 14 days.

People should talk to their health care professional for more information.

**Are there any indications that COVID-19 vaccines will not be suitable for people with disability?**

All medicines, including vaccines, have risks and benefits. Usually, any side effects are mild and may only last a few days.

Through clinical trials, some of the temporary side effects reported for the COVID-19 vaccine are normal such as pain at the injection site, fever or muscle aches.

The person providing your vaccination will be provided further clinical information and training about the COVID-19 vaccines and pre-existing medical conditions. You can talk to the person providing the vaccination, your doctor or pharmacist, about your medical condition and about any potential risks.

Information on the ingredients of any vaccine will be available in the Consumer Medicines Information leaflet which will be made available on the Therapeutic Goods Administration website at [www.tga.gov.au](http://www.tga.gov.au) using the search term 'Consumer Medicines Information'.

## Proof of vaccination

### **Can I refuse service from a support worker/carer if they have not been vaccinated?**

People with disability have choice over who supports them. People with disability can ask the provider to make sure that the workers that they employ to support a person are vaccinated. If a worker does not wish to be vaccinated, the person's provider will need to make alternate arrangements for the person with disability's support, in close consultation with the person with disability. This may mean identifying another support worker.

### **I am an NDIS participant. Can my support worker refuse service if I have not received the COVID-19 vaccine?**

No. COVID-19 vaccinations are not mandatory vaccinations. People have the right to decide whether they will be vaccinated or not. If a person chooses not to be vaccinated, the risk of infection can continue to be managed through the use of recommended infection control practices. If a provider or support worker refuses to continue to provide supports to you because you have not received the COVID-19 vaccine, it could be a breach of the [NDIS Code of Conduct \(NDIS Providers\)](#) and a complaint can be made to the NDIS Commission.

## Vaccination appointment

### **Can I bring someone with me to my vaccination appointment?**

Yes. People with disability can attend their vaccination appointment with whoever they feel most comfortable with. This could include a support worker, family member, carer or friend.

COVIDSafe practices will still be required to be observed including social distancing and masks if applicable depending on the location.

## Informed consent

### **How do I provide informed consent?**

The Australian Government is working with ATAGI to develop resources for informed consent. More information on informed consent, including consent forms, will be available soon.

**How will consent be provided by people with disability who are unable to consent themselves?**

Informed consent for each dose of the vaccination must be appropriately given and recorded on behalf of the person with disability who are unable to consent themselves. More information will be provided about this process.