



Australian Government



# COVID-19 vaccines: common questions

This information is accurate as at 12 January 2022.

## Who can get COVID-19 vaccines?

Everyone aged 5 years and over in Australia can get the COVID-19 vaccine for free. If you are receiving your vaccine at a government vaccination clinic, you won't need a Medicare card. You can find a clinic and book a COVID-19 vaccine using the vaccine clinic finder

<https://covid-vaccine.healthdirect.gov.au/>

Three vaccines are approved for use in Australia: Comirnaty (Pfizer), Spikevax (Moderna) and Vaxzevria (AstraZeneca).

Criteria	Pfizer	Moderna	AstraZeneca
Approved age group	5 years and over	12 years and over	18 years and over
First and second dose (initial course)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Third dose for immunocompromised people	Yes	Yes	Not preferred
Booster dose	Yes, 18 years and over	Yes, 18 years and over	Not preferred

## Why should I get the COVID-19 vaccine?

COVID-19 can be a very serious illness. It is especially dangerous for the vulnerable people in our community. Getting a vaccine is one of the best ways to protect yourself and your community from getting very sick or dying from COVID-19.

Evidence shows COVID-19 vaccines help reduce the virus spreading. By getting vaccinated, we can slow the spread of the virus. Research suggests that if someone gets sick from COVID-19 after being vaccinated, they are less likely to make other people sick compared to someone who has not had their vaccine.

## How do COVID-19 vaccines work?

COVID-19 vaccines work like other vaccines. Vaccines help to train a person's body to recognise and fight against viruses that can cause illness, without giving you the illness itself. The COVID-19 vaccine helps the body recognise and fight the virus that causes COVID-19.

## Are COVID-19 vaccines safe?

The Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) are the scientists and medical experts who regulate and approve vaccines, medicines and other medical products for use in Australia. The TGA checks all COVID-19 vaccines for quality, safety and effectiveness before approving them for use in Australia. This is the same process that all vaccines go through in Australia.

Medical experts at the TGA continuously check all vaccines to make sure they are safe. Vaccines are only approved for use in Australia after they have been assessed to show that the benefits of the vaccine outweigh any risks.

## Have COVID-19 vaccines been developed too quickly?

COVID-19 vaccines were developed to be safe and effective. It may seem like they were developed quickly, however researchers around the world have been working hard together to develop COVID-19 vaccines from the start of the pandemic. The same process has been followed for other vaccines, and no steps were skipped.

Safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines were developed quickly because of:

- large amounts of funding invested in research and manufacturing
- the availability of new technology to speed up development
- researchers, scientists and manufacturers around the world working together
- some steps of the clinical trials and approval process happened at the same time, instead of one after the other.

This gave us access to the vaccines as quickly as possible.

## How do COVID-19 vaccines protect us?

COVID-19 vaccines teach your body to recognise and fight the virus that causes COVID-19. They do not contain COVID-19. You cannot get COVID-19 from having the vaccine. Vaccines are a safe way of building protection against the virus in the body, without causing illness.

COVID-19 vaccines approved for use in Australia have been shown to be very good at protecting against severe illness, going to hospital and death.

You can talk to your doctor about the COVID-19 vaccines and why vaccination is an important part of keeping the community safe and healthy.

## What side effects should I expect from the COVID-19 vaccines?

All vaccines can have some side effects. These side effects are usually mild and only last for a few days.

Side effects can include:

- a sore arm after the injection
- fever
- muscle aches
- headaches.

If you have any questions or worries after your vaccination, contact your vaccination clinic or doctor.

If your symptoms are severe, you can call Triple Zero (000) for an ambulance to take you to hospital. If you don't speak English, when you call Triple Zero (000), ask for 'ambulance' and once you are connected, you need to stay on the line and request an interpreter.

The Triple Zero (000) emergency services line will call the Translating and Interpreting Service and connect you with an interpreter using a priority line 24 hours a day, every day of the year.

Severe symptoms can include:

- having difficulty breathing
- wheezing,
- having a fast heartbeat, or
- collapsing.

There is a link between AstraZeneca vaccine and a very rare condition, which involves blood clotting, and low blood platelet levels. Read more about this at:

<https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publication/astrazeneca-information-other-languages>

## Can children get COVID-19 vaccines?

Australia's immunisation experts, the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI), recommends that children aged 5 to 11 years can receive the [Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine for children](#). The Pfizer vaccine for children is a smaller dose of the Pfizer vaccine.

ATAGI recommends that children aged 12 years and over can have normal doses of the Pfizer or Moderna COVID-19 vaccines.

To find out what's right for you and your family, talk to your doctor.

## Should pregnant and breastfeeding women get vaccinated?

If you are pregnant, breastfeeding or planning pregnancy, it is recommended that you get the Pfizer or Moderna COVID-19 vaccine. Research from around the world shows that the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are safe for pregnant and breastfeeding women.

If you catch COVID-19, you and your unborn baby could be in danger. There is:

- a higher risk of needing to go to hospital
- a slightly higher chance of the baby being born early and needing to go to a hospital
- a slightly higher risk of stillbirth (baby being born not alive).

Getting a COVID-19 vaccine at any time during pregnancy is the best way to lower these risks.

If you are breastfeeding and unable to access the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine, you can consider having AstraZeneca, if the benefits outweigh the risks of vaccination for you. No matter which vaccine you have, you do not need to stop breastfeeding your baby at any time.

For more information about the safety of COVID-19 vaccines when pregnant or breastfeeding, talk to your doctor. More information can be found at [www.health.gov.au/resources/translated/pregnancy-and-covid-19-vaccines-other-languages](http://www.health.gov.au/resources/translated/pregnancy-and-covid-19-vaccines-other-languages)

## Do COVID-19 vaccines cause infertility?

There is no scientific evidence showing that COVID-19 vaccines cause infertility or sterility in men or women.

The TGA will not approve a vaccine for use in Australia unless it is safe and effective. This means the TGA will not approve a vaccine if it impacts male or female fertility. Studies have not found infertility to be side-effect of any COVID-19 vaccine approved by TGA.

## How many doses of the COVID-19 vaccine do I need? Do they have to be the same type of COVID-19 vaccine to be effective?

Medical experts from ATAGI say that it's best for your initial COVID-19 vaccine course to be 2 doses of the same vaccine. This is also what the TGA have approved.

The person doing your vaccination will let you know what type of vaccine you received, and when you should book your second appointment.

## What's the difference between a third dose and a booster dose?

A **third dose** of the COVID-19 vaccine is recommended for people aged 12 years and over who are severely immunocompromised. This is because people who are severely immunocompromised are at greater risk of getting very sick from COVID-19 and need a third dose to have the best protection against the virus. If you are severely immunocompromised, you should get your third dose 2 to 6 months after getting your second dose. If you're not sure if you should get a third dose, talk to your doctor to find out what's best for you.

**Booster doses** are recommended for everyone 18 years and over who have had their initial course of COVID-19 vaccination. As immunity from COVID-19 vaccines reduces over time, booster doses increase your protection against getting very sick or dying from COVID-19. A booster dose will help maintain your protection against COVID-19 for a longer period of time.

## Do I need a third dose of COVID-19 vaccine?

The Australia's immunisation experts, ATAGI recommends a third dose of COVID-19 vaccine for people over 12 years of age who are [severely immunocompromised](#). People who are severely immunocompromised have lower levels of immunity than the rest of the population. They need this third dose to get the same protection others will have from two doses.

Those who are eligible should get their third dose between 2 to 6 months after their second dose of COVID-19 vaccine.

## When should I get my COVID-19 vaccine booster dose?

A booster dose will help maintain your protection against COVID-19. You can get a booster dose of the COVID-19 vaccine if:

- you are 18 years of age or older, and
- you have completed your initial course of COVID-19 vaccination at least 4 months ago.

From 31 January 2022, you can get a COVID-19 booster dose if you had your second dose of your initial course of COVID-19 vaccination at least 3 months ago.

Pregnant women who have had two doses of the vaccine, and immunocompromised people aged 18 years and over who have had three doses of the vaccine should also get a booster dose in these same recommended timeframes.

The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are approved by the TGA and ATAGI for the COVID-19 booster dose. You can have the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine as a booster, no matter which vaccine brand you had for your first two doses.

You can also get the AstraZeneca vaccine as a booster if you can't have the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine for medical reasons, or you have had two doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine previously.

Booster doses are not currently recommend for people aged 5 to 17 years.

## What happens if I don't get a booster dose?

If you don't get a booster dose, you will have less protection against getting very sick from COVID-19 over time. You may also have a higher risk of spreading the virus to your friends, family and community.

It is recommended that everyone get a free booster dose after their second COVID-19 vaccine. However, you only require your first two doses to be considered fully vaccinated.

## How can I book my COVID-19 vaccine, my third dose, or my booster dose?

You can find a clinic and book a COVID-19 vaccination using the [Vaccine Clinic Finder](#), or by calling 1800 020 080. For interpreting services, call 131 450.

You can also talk to your doctor or participating community pharmacist about booking your vaccination.

## Are COVID-19 vaccines compulsory in Australia?

Vaccination for COVID-19 is voluntary. People can choose if they want to have COVID-19 vaccines. You will not receive a fine for not having the COVID-19 vaccines.

Vaccination against COVID-19 is a requirement for people working in residential aged care. Some states and territories have their own vaccination requirements as well. There are exemptions in place for people who are unable to be vaccinated due to medical conditions.

### **Can I have one of the vaccines from overseas?**

People in Australia can only have COVID-19 vaccines that have been approved by the TGA for use in Australia. These vaccines may also be approved for use in other countries. You should not try and buy a COVID-19 vaccine online, as these are likely to be unsafe or fake.

### **Once I have had a vaccination, do I still need to take other precautions to stop the spread of COVID-19?**

After receiving your vaccination, it is still important for you to continue safe practices to stop COVID-19 from spreading.

Stay 1.5 metres away from others, wash your hands regularly with soap and water, stay home when you are sick, get tested for COVID-19 and wear a mask when required.

### **Will COVID-19 vaccines work if COVID-19 changes?**

All viruses change over time. This is called mutation. Scientific evidence shows COVID-19 vaccines can still help prevent severe disease from new mutations of COVID-19. The TGA continue to closely look at this as part of their usual approval and monitoring processes.

In the future, COVID-19 vaccines may need to be changed for different COVID-19 mutations. This currently happens with the flu vaccination each year. Researchers and vaccine manufacturers are continuing to investigate this.

### **Do people who have had COVID-19 still need to be vaccinated?**

People who have had COVID-19 and have recovered should still be vaccinated. The virus that causes COVID-19 is a new virus and experts do not know how long natural immunity lasts after the infection. It is very likely that protection from re-infection will reduce over time. It is sensible to have the vaccine to boost immunity and ensure that the protection lasts longer.

### **I had COVID-19 recently. How long should I wait before I get my COVID-19 vaccine or booster dose?**

It is safe for people who have been infected by COVID-19 to get their COVID-19 vaccine or booster dose. They can do so as soon as their symptoms of the virus are gone. To find out when the right time is for your next COVID-19 vaccine dose, talk to your doctor.

### **Will the flu vaccine protect me against getting COVID-19?**

Influenza (flu) and COVID-19 are both viruses, but they are not the same. The flu vaccine does not give immunity for, or protection from, COVID-19.

The COVID-19 vaccine will not give protection from the flu. It is recommended to have both the flu and COVID-19 vaccines. People can be given a COVID-19 vaccine and an influenza vaccine on the same day.

### **Should I take blood thinning medication before having the AstraZeneca vaccine?**

No, you do not need to take blood thinning medication before receiving your vaccination.

You should continue to take your regular medication unless advised by your doctor.

### **Will COVID-19 vaccines change my genes or DNA?**

No, COVID-19 vaccines do not change your genes or DNA.

Some of the new COVID-19 vaccines use a fragment of messenger RNA (mRNA) to tell your body to have an immune response against COVID-19. The vaccines do not give you COVID-19.

DNA is a different type of molecule to the RNA in the mRNA vaccines. The mRNA does not do anything to your DNA and is broken down soon after it enters your body.

### **Is the vaccine going to collect my genes or DNA?**

No. When you get a vaccine, it goes into your body, usually into the muscle in your upper arm. COVID-19 vaccines in Australia are given by injection. Genes and DNA are not collected by having a COVID-19 vaccination.

### **Will COVID-19 vaccines connect me to the internet?**

No, COVID-19 vaccines do not – and cannot – connect you to the internet. The vaccine is a medical product and is not digital.

### **Do COVID-19 vaccines contain microchips or tracking technology?**

None of the COVID-19 vaccines contain software or microchips. They cannot track people.

### **Can COVID-19 vaccines give me COVID-19?**

None of the approved COVID-19 vaccines in Australia contain the live virus that causes COVID-19. This means the COVID-19 vaccine cannot make you sick with COVID-19, and the vaccine does not make you shed the virus.

Some side effects from COVID-19 vaccines, such as fever, muscle aches and tiredness, can seem like symptoms of COVID-19. These symptoms are part of the normal reaction to vaccination. They can be a sign that the body is building protection against the COVID-19 virus.

## Do the COVID-19 vaccines contain animal products?

The COVID-19 vaccines approved for use in Australia do not contain any animal, meat or egg products.

## What do faith leaders think about COVID-19 vaccines?

The COVID-19 vaccines approved for use in Australia are permitted by many faith leaders.

On 22 December 2020, the Vatican supported the use of COVID-19 vaccines. You can read the Vatican's statement at:

[https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20201221\\_nota-vaccini-anticovid\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20201221_nota-vaccini-anticovid_en.html)

The Australian Fatwa Council issued a COVID-19 Vaccine Fatwa on 13 February 2021. The Fatwa was issued after researching and discussing COVID-19 vaccines with trusted and credible Muslim doctors and medical experts. The Fatwa advises Australia's COVID-19 vaccines are permissible according to the Islamic law. You can read the Australian Fatwa Council's COVID-19 Vaccine Fatwa at: <https://www.anic.org.au/fatwa-council/>

The Great Synagogue Sydney published a Sermon on 27 February 2021 supporting the use of COVID-19 vaccines. You can read the Sermon at:

<https://www.greatsynagogue.org.au/rabbiscorner.html>

The Australian Islamic Medical Association published a statement about COVID-19 vaccines on 13 August 2021. You can view the statement at: <https://aimamed.com.au/feature-content/>

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

If you want to talk to someone about COVID-19 vaccines, call the National Coronavirus Helpline on 1800 020 080. The helpline is available 24 hours every day. For interpreting services, call 131 450.

You can learn more at the Department of Health's website, where information is available in 63 languages: [www.health.gov.au/covid19-vaccines-languages](http://www.health.gov.au/covid19-vaccines-languages).

You can also talk to your doctor or local healthcare professional.

It is important to stay informed through reliable and official sources such as the Department of Health or the Therapeutic Goods Administration.