COVID-19 Vaccine exemptions

Background

COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective. They're recommended for all Australians from 5 years of age.

There are some situations where a vaccine may not be recommended, or when you should postpone your vaccination.

Temporary exemptions

- **You've recently had COVID-19:**

The Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) recommends that you delay your COVID-19 vaccination if you've been infected with the virus until you've recovered from the acute illness. Once you recover you can be vaccinated or defer vaccination for up to 4 months. This is because past infection reduces the chance of reinfection for at least this amount of time.

- **You have a major medical condition:**

If you have a major medical condition, you may need to postpone having your COVID-19 vaccination. For example, if you are about to have major surgery or you're going to be admitted to hospital for a serious illness. Your doctor will be able to advise when you might be able to have your vaccine.

- **You've had a heart illness:**

If you've had:

- recent (within the past 3 months) myocarditis or pericarditis
- acute rheumatic fever or acute rheumatic heart disease (with active myocardial inflammation)
- acute decompensated heart failure

you can have an mRNA vaccine, such as Pfizer (also known as Comirnaty) or Moderna (also known as Spikevax). But you should speak with your GP or specialist about the best timing for your vaccination.

If you need to wait to be vaccinated, you can ask your GP for a temporary medical exemption. More information on exemptions can be found on the Health website.

https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/atagi-expanded-guidance-on-temporary-medical-exemptions-for-covid-19-vaccines

You've had a serious Adverse Event Following Immunisation (AEFI):

If you've had a serious adverse event after a previous COVID-19 vaccine, you might need to delay getting any further doses.

A serious AEFI might be if you:

- have to go to hospital
- are already in hospital for something else, and now you need to stay longer
- experience a disability or incapacity.

To be counted as a serious AEFI requiring a medical exemption, it needs to be:

- reported to a state/territory adverse event system and/or the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA), and
- likely to cause another serious adverse event if you receive another dose of a vaccine (in the opinion of an experienced immunisation provider or medical specialist).

You can only get a medical exemption if there are no other COVID-19 vaccine options available to you.

Examples of a serious AEFI include:

- thrombosis with thrombocytopenia (TTS) following Vaxzevria (AstraZeneca)
- a medically significant illness (e.g., immune thrombocytopenia purpura (ITP), myocarditis)
- potentially life-threatening events (e.g., anaphylaxis)
- a persistent or significant disability (e.g., Guillain-Barré Syndrome).

- **If getting a vaccine is risky to you or others:**

If you are a risk to yourself or others during the vaccination process you may be able to defer vaccination. For example, if you have an underlying developmental condition or mental health disorder. In these circumstances there may be a specialist service you can use to have the vaccine.

Permanent exemption

You can only get a permanent medical exemption from having a COVID-19 vaccine if you have been assessed by an authorised medical practitioner as being clinically unsuitable to receive a COVID-19 vaccine permanently.

To receive a permanent medical exemption, you need to have a permanent medical condition that would make it unsafe for you to have any of the Australian-approved COVID-19 vaccines.

If you can't get any of the approved COVID-19 vaccines for medical reasons, this will be recorded on your immunisation history statement and COVID-19 digital certificate. You can find out more about the COVID-19 digital certificate on the Services Australia website.

COVID-19 digital certificate as proof of your COVID-19 vaccinations - Seeking medical help - Services Australia

Questions and Answers

Question: What if I'm pregnant?

Answer: If you're pregnant, it's safe for you to have a COVID-19 vaccine. mRNA vaccines (Pfizer and Moderna) are preferred in pregnancy. If you are pregnant and have an illness, or have experienced an adverse event, you should speak to your doctor first.

Question: What if I have a mild reaction?

Answer: You may experience temporary side effects after having the COVID-19 vaccine.

These might include:

- pain or swelling at the injection site
- tiredness
- headache
- muscle or joint pain
- fever and chills.

Normally, these will go away a few days following your vaccination.

You will be asked to stay at the clinic or pharmacy for about 15 minutes after you have the vaccination. This is so staff can monitor you and make sure you're feeling well before you leave.

Question: What if I have more serious reactions?
Answer: You must contact a doctor or go to hospital straight away if you experience any of the following:

- chest pain
- pressure or discomfort in the chest
- irregular, skipped heartbeats or 'fluttering'
- fainting
- shortness of breath

If you have a serious side effect to a COVID-19 vaccine, your doctor may need to speak to the local immunisation service or a relevant medical specialist.

Question: What is the duration of a temporary exemption?

Answer: Temporary exemptions for longer than 6 months are not usually recommended straight away. Your doctor will monitor your health as you get better, to see when it is safe for you to have the vaccination and be protected against COVID-19.

A temporary medical exemption can only be given by someone who is authorised to do this. This person must use their Medicare provider number.

You can read more Frequently Asked Questions on exemptions to mandatory COVID-19 vaccinations in residential aged care on the Health website.

COVID-19 vaccination – Mandatory vaccination of residential aged care workers | Australian Government Department of Health