



Australian Government

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Group on COVID-19

Communique Update: 15 July 2021

The [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Group on COVID-19](#) (Advisory Group) was formed in March 2020 to develop and deliver a National Management Plan to protect communities. The Advisory Group also advises on health issues related to COVID-19 pandemic response and the vaccine rollout. It is co-chaired by the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO), and the National COVID Vaccine Taskforce. This communique provides an update on their work and current key focus areas.

Pfizer vaccine roll out

The Advisory Group is continuing to prioritise rolling out Pfizer vaccines to eligible Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. As of 2 July, all Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services (ACCHS) who have indicated they wished to administer Pfizer vaccine have now been onboarded. Over 140 ACCHS sites will be administering Pfizer vaccines with a number collaborating with state and territory government clinics or the Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) to reach some of our most remote and vulnerable in the community.

The Advisory Group continues to drive the importance of access to COVID vaccines through ACCHS and the primary health care sector as critical for improving vaccine coverage among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across the country. The importance of primary care involvement in the vaccine roll-out has been highlighted by a number of recent stories.

- The Department, in partnership with the Victorian Government and the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO), expedited the rollout of Pfizer to three ACCHS within Victoria to enhance access to the Pfizer vaccine ahead of the main program. As part of the expedited rollout for Victoria, Mallee District Aboriginal Services (MDAS) in Mildura commenced administering Pfizer vaccine on 18 June 2021.
- On 1 July, ABC News reported strong uptake of COVID-19 vaccines in the remote NT area of [Utiu](#) with almost all eligible people having received their first dose.
- On 4 July, Mala'la Health Service Aboriginal Corporation shared on Facebook that Maningrida vaccinated [453 people](#), which broke the record for the most COVID-19 vaccines being administered in one day by any vaccination hub in the NT. This service went on to vaccinate more than 1300 residents over the week.
- NT Health has reported that bookings for COVID-19 vaccines in the [Katherine region](#) are on the rise with 35.8% of the population having received their first dose and 15.8% of the population having received their second dose.
- The Royal Flying Doctor Service has started administering Pfizer in the [Ngaanyatjarra-Giles \(NG\) Lands](#) (very remote WA) in partnership Ngaanyatjarra

Health Service and communities. Roughly 4,000 people across 11 communities and surrounding homelands will be vaccinated over a 4-6 week period.

Great vaccination stories are taking place right around Australia, and we will share more in the next communique.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people over 16 years of age remain a priority population for COVID-19 vaccination. To book your COVID vaccination, contact your health clinic or find a vaccination site near you through the [Clinic Finder](#).

The Advisory Group welcomes the decisions announced following the recent National Cabinet meetings:

National Cabinet met on 28 June 2021 to discuss Australia's COVID-19 response, recent outbreaks of COVID-19 and the Australian COVID-19 Vaccine Strategy including making it mandatory for all aged care workers to have their first vaccine dose by mid-September. ACCHS continue their collaboration with the Commonwealth, States and Territories and individual providers to support vaccinations of Aged Care Workers. Additional information regarding the meeting can be found [here](#).

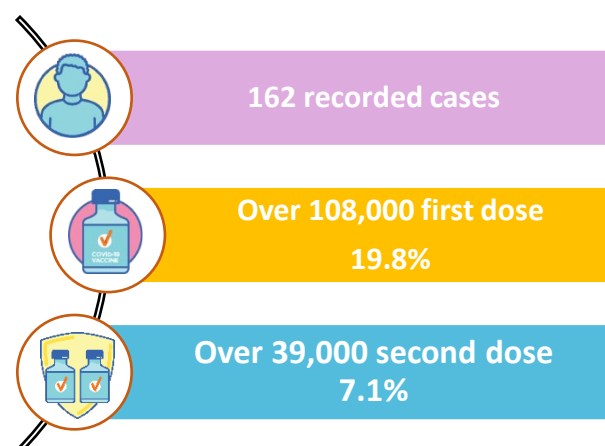
National Cabinet met again on 2 July 2021 to discuss Australia's COVID-19 response, recent outbreaks of COVID-19 and the Australian COVID-19 Vaccine Strategy. At this meeting National Cabinet agreed to formulate a [National Plan](#) to transition from pre to post vaccination stages. Additional information regarding the meeting can be found [here](#).

Data and surveillance

The Advisory Group has an important role in monitoring the safety of the COVID-19 vaccinations for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders continue to be a priority for vaccine administration; and ongoing support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Health Services.

The Advisory Group has established a Data Surveillance Working Group, to consider vaccine data and implementation / surveillance issues, including the continued rollout of the vaccine, how to monitor coverage for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and the differing ways this information can be used.

Current statistics



The number of COVID-19 cases in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations to date is 162; and there been no deaths recorded for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population.

With respect to number of vaccinations, there have been over 108,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across Australia who have received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine.

Staying COVID safe

The Advisory Group continues to work in partnership with the National COVID Vaccine Taskforce, state and territory governments and sector stakeholders wherever outbreaks occur to ensure all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are supported. Most recently Advisory Group members have worked closely with the Incident Management Team in response to the outbreak in the Northern Territory given the associated risks to remote communities; and are also working closely to support the Greater Sydney region.

The Advisory Group acknowledges that COVID-19 cases have increased again in many places in Australia, and some states and territories have introduced new rules around entering or leaving borders. It is more important than ever to keep safe in any way that we can.

It's important to continue doing simple behaviours that can help keep the virus from infecting you:

- staying two big steps apart from others in the community,
- keeping your hands clean by washing them regularly for about 20 seconds,
- staying home when you're feeling sick, and
- getting tested for the virus if you have symptoms.

The COVID-19 vaccines are safe and very effective at preventing you from getting seriously sick or needing to go to a hospital if you catch the virus. The COVID-19 vaccines are now available for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 16 years and over. Make an appointment to speak to your healthcare worker about your vaccination.

New COVID-19 variants can spread more easily among people in our communities. It can sometimes spread between two people walking past each other at the shops or in the park.

If you have any symptoms of COVID-19, like:

- a headache
- a sore throat
- a runny nose
- a fever
- a persistent cough

or if you have been in a risk location identified by your state or territory, please go and get tested straight away. It is important to get tested even if you have had the COVID-19 vaccine. The best way to protect yourself and your community from COVID-19 is to get vaccinated.

Resources

The whole community plays an important role in stopping the spread of COVID-19. A range of resources are available on the Department of Health [website](#) to help you stay informed about the risks of COVID-19 and how to protect yourself and others.

Recently, the Department of Health released a [video](#) from Thursday Island explaining the importance of being vaccinated against COVID-19.

The Department of Health provides regular electronic newsletter updates about the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander response to COVID-19. [Subscribe](#) to directly receive these updates.