



Australian Government

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Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Group on COVID-19

Communique Update: 25 January 2021

Vaccination against the coronavirus is an important step to protect all Australians from severe COVID-19 disease. Getting vaccinated will help to protect yourself, family, community and Elders. Vaccination will be free and is expected to start in February 2021 for people at high risk of infection such as frontline healthcare workers. Vaccination of other population groups will follow.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Group on COVID-19 (the Taskforce) met on 19 January 2021 to consider the first version of the COVID-19 Vaccine Implementation Plan for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The Implementation Plan builds on [Australia's COVID-19 Vaccine National Rollout Strategy](#) and complements the [Management Plan for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Populations](#), State and Territory implementation plans, and plans for other target populations.

Staged rollout of the COVID-19 vaccine is expected to commence in February 2021. The Taskforce noted the overarching Australian Government approach to prioritisation has been guided by medical and technical experts. The Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) acknowledged that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have an increased risk of getting and developing serious illness from COVID-19 due to multiple factors, including having a high rate of chronic health conditions and a greater chance of living in communities where crowded living conditions exist.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults will be eligible for the vaccine in the second priority group (Phase 1B) of the National Rollout Strategy which will commence indicatively from early March 2021. The second priority group (1B) includes all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults and non-Indigenous adults over 70 years or with chronic medical conditions.

Before any COVID-19 vaccine is approved for use in Australia it will be subject to the TGA's stringent assessment and approval processes. The TGA rigorously assesses all vaccines for safety, quality and effectiveness. Vaccine candidates are subject to clinical and non-clinical assessments by technical experts.

General Practice-led Respiratory Clinics (GPRCs) and Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs) will be key vaccine provider sites. Specific training will be provided to healthcare workers before they are able to administer the vaccine.

The vaccine will be made available to everyone, this includes people who are not eligible for Medicare. While the Government strongly supports COVID-19 vaccination, it is not mandatory.

A comprehensive communications strategy is being implemented by the Australian Government to support COVID-19 vaccine uptake, including specific considerations for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities.

Key messages are in the categories of:

- community benefit

- effectiveness
- science and safety
- government response and oversight
- availability, cost and administration
- information and consent
- processes for the health sector.

The [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Group on COVID-19](#) (the Taskforce) was convened in March 2020 to develop and deliver a National Management Plan to protect communities. The Taskforce also advises on health issues related to COVID-19 and is co-chaired by the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO), and the Australian Government Department of Health. It continues to meet weekly and receives regular updates about the COVID-19 vaccines.

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.