COVID-19 vaccines: common questions

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Why should I get the COVID-19 vaccine?

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

Who can get the COVID-19 vaccine?

Everyone aged 5 years and over in Australia can get a 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 book your COVID-19 vaccine using the vaccine clinic finder: https://covid-vaccine.healthdirect.gov.au/

Some children aged 6 months to 4 years with severe immunocompromise, disability, and those who have complex and/or multiple health conditions that increase their risk of severe COVID-19 are eligible to receive a COVID-19 vaccine. These children have an increased risk of getting very sick from COVID-19. You can book your child's COVID-19 vaccine appointment using the vaccine clinic finder: https://covid-vaccine.healthdirect.gov.au/

To maintain protection against severe illness from COVID-19, keep up to date with your COVID-19 vaccinations as recommended for your age and health needs.

How many COVID-19 doses do I need to stay up to date?

Immunity from COVID-19 vaccine reduces over time. New variants of COVID-19 are also very good at evading people's immunity. Having all the doses of a COVID-19 vaccine recommended for your age and health needs will help make sure your protection against getting very sick from COVID-19 is maintained.

A **third dose** is recommended for everyone 16 years and over who had their last dose 3 months ago. Third doses are also recommended for some people aged 12 to 15 years if they have certain health conditions.

A **fourth dose** of the vaccine is recommended for everyone aged 50 years and older, and people aged 16 years and older at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19. People aged 30 to 49 years old can also receive a fourth dose if they choose. You can get a fourth dose 3 months after your third dose

Some people may require an **additional dose** if they are severely immunocompromised. This is because people who are severely immunocompromised are at a much greater risk of getting very sick from COVID-19.

For more information about vaccine doses, including eligibility for third, fourth and additional doses, visit www.health.gov.au/resources/translated/covid-19-vaccination-when-to-get-your-vaccination-other-languages

Talk to your doctor if you are not sure what doses you need to stay up to date for your age and health needs.

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

Yes. If you have had COVID-19 and have recovered, you should still get your next COVID-19 vaccine dose to maintain your protection. It is very likely that protection from re-infection will reduce over time.

If you have tested positive for COVID-19, you should wait 3 months after infection before receiving your next COVID-19 vaccine dose.

Which COVID-19 vaccines are approved for use in Australia?

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

Read more about the COVID-19 vaccines in your language:

1. Pfizer vaccine: https://www.health.gov.au/resources/translated/covid-19-vaccination-information-on-covid-19-comirnaty-pfizer-vaccine-other-languages
2. AstraZeneca vaccine: https://www.health.gov.au/resources/translated/covid-19-vaccination-information-on-vaxzevria-astrazeneca-covid-19-vaccine-other-languages
3. Moderna vaccine: https://www.health.gov.au/resources/translated/covid-19-vaccination-information-on-spikevax-moderna-covid-19-vaccine-other-languages
4. Novavax vaccine: https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/covid-19-vaccination-information-on-nuvaxovid-novavax-covid-19-vaccine

How do COVID-19 vaccines work?

COVID-19 vaccines work like other vaccines. Vaccines help to train your 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. They do not contain COVID-19 and you cannot get COVID-19 from having the vaccine.

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.

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. 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.

COVID-19 vaccines were developed quickly because of:

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

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

Can children get COVID-19 vaccines?

Everyone in Australia is at risk of getting COVID-19, including children and young people. Although most children and young people who get COVID-19 have a mild illness, some can still get very sick. Ensuring children are up to date with their COVID-19 vaccinations reduces this risk.

Australia's immunisation experts, the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI), recommends that all children aged 5 years and over are vaccinated against COVID-19.

Some children who are aged 6 months to 4 years are eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine if they are severely immunocompromised, or have disability, as well as those who have complex and/or multiple health conditions that increase their risk of severe COVID-19. These children have an increased risk of getting very sick from COVID-19.

You can book your child's COVID-19 vaccine appointment using the Vaccine Clinic Finder: https://covid-vaccine.healthdirect.gov.au/

Should pregnant and breastfeeding women get vaccinated?

COVID-19 during pregnancy increases the risk of complications for pregnant women and their unborn babies.

If you catch COVID-19, there is:

www.health.gov.au/covid19-vaccines-languages

- a higher risk of going to hospital
- a slightly higher chance of the baby being born early and going 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 protect against these risks.

The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are the preferred COVID-19 vaccines to get if you are pregnant, breastfeeding or planning pregnancy. If you cannot have these vaccines, you can have the Novavax or AstraZeneca vaccine. Women can receive the vaccine at any stage of pregnancy.

Research from around the world shows that the Pfizer and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines are safe for pregnant and breastfeeding women.

There are no known safety concerns associated with Novavax or AstraZeneca that are specific to pregnancy, breastfeeding or planning pregnancy. However, these vaccines are not preferred because there is less data about their safety in pregnant or breastfeeding women.

Talk to your doctor to find out more about the safety of COVID-19 vaccines when pregnant or breastfeeding.

More information can be found at www.health.gov.au/resources/translated/pregnancy-and-covid-19-vaccines-other-languages

How can I book my COVID-19 vaccine?

You can find a clinic and book a COVID-19 vaccination using the Vaccine Clinic Finder at https://covid-vaccine.healthdirect.gov.au/booking/. You can also call 1800 020 080 and press 8 for free interpreting services.

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

You can also easily book a COVID-19 vaccine appointment by using the Easy Vaccine Access (EVA) service. With the service, a phone operator can call you in your language to help with the booking. EVA is available every day from 7am to 10pm (AEST). Send a text message with 'Hey EVA' to 0481 611 382, and EVA will reply in English asking for:

- name
- preferred language
- the state or territory where you live
- preferred date and time for your call back
- best number for a call back.

A trained phone operator will call you back at the scheduled time to help you book your COVID-19 vaccination.

Can COVID-19 vaccines cause infertility in adults, or future infertility in children?

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

There is also no scientific evidence that COVID-19 vaccines lead to future fertility problems in children.

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 a side-effect of any COVID-19 vaccine approved by TGA.

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 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.

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 may 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 buy a COVID-19 vaccine online as these are likely to be unsafe or fake.

www.health.gov.au/covid19-vaccines-languages

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

After receiving your vaccination, it is still important for you to continue safe practices to slow the spread of COVID-19.

Simple measures like staying 1.5 metres away from others, washing your hands regularly with soap and water, staying home when you are sick, getting tested for COVID-19 and wearing a mask can help slow the spread of COVID-19.

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 continues 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.

Will the influenza vaccine protect me against getting COVID-19?

No. Influenza and COVID-19 are both viruses, but they are not the same. The influenza vaccine does not give immunity for, or protection from, COVID-19.

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

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.

www.health.gov.au/covid19-vaccines-languages

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

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 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 free interpreting services, press 8.

You can learn more at the Department of Health and Aged Care's website, where information is available in 63 languages: 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 and Aged Care or the Therapeutic Goods Administration.