

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



about COVID-19 vaccines
for Aboriginal and Torres Strait
Islander people affected by cancer

- With the assistance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and health experts, Cancer Australia has compiled answers to Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) about the COVID-19 vaccines for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have been affected by cancer.
- This information can help you with some key questions you may have about the COVID-19 vaccines.
- The answers to these FAQs are based on information and evidence currently available in Australia and internationally, and will be updated as new information emerges.

What are COVID-19 vaccines and how do they work?

The COVID-19 vaccines strengthen your immune system by training it to find and fight the coronavirus 'spike' protein. The spike protein is not the virus - it is the 'pointy' bit of the coronavirus which helps the virus enter people's bodies. The COVID-19 vaccines cannot give you COVID-19.

After having a COVID-19 vaccine your body sees the spike protein as foreign and produces immune cells and antibodies to fight it.

Vaccine dose schedules

The COVID-19 vaccines are available to all people in Australia aged 5 years or older. Children **aged 6 months to <5 years with** health conditions which increase the risk of severe COVID-19, including many children with cancer, are also eligible for COVID-19 vaccination (for more information: [ATAGI recommendations on COVID-19 vaccine use in children aged 6 months to <5 years](#)).

For most people in Australia aged 5 years or older, the COVID-19 vaccination schedule involves:

- 2 'primary' vaccine doses
- a 'booster' dose for people aged 16 years or older given three months after they have completed their primary course, and

- a 2nd booster dose known as the "winter booster dose" given three months after the 1st booster (4 doses in total) for:
 - all people aged 50 years or older
 - people aged 30 to 49 years old if they choose
 - people aged 16 years or older with certain medical conditions including cancer within the past 5 years.

For severely immunocompromised people, such as many people with cancer, who are at greatest risk of severe illness from COVID-19, ATAGI recommends additional vaccine doses and boosters as follows:

Children aged between 6 months and 5 years receive 2 'primary' vaccine doses

Children aged 5-11 years old get 3 'primary' COVID-19 vaccine doses

Adolescents aged 12-15 years get 3 'primary' vaccine doses plus 1 booster dose (4 doses in total)

People aged 16 years or older get 3 'primary' vaccine doses plus 2 booster doses (**5 doses in total**).

For an overview of which vaccines and doses are recommended for each age and population group, visit this infographic: [ATAGI recommended COVID-19 doses and vaccines](#).

Did you know the COVID-19 vaccines are currently being offered to **all** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 5 years and over? To find vaccination locations and book an appointment, visit the [COVID-19 Vaccine Clinic Finder](#).

Antiviral treatments for COVID-19

If you test positive to COVID-19, it is important to let your treating team know as soon as possible, because there are COVID-19 treatments available. These antiviral treatments work best when they are given within 5 days after symptoms begin.

For more information about COVID-19 antiviral treatments, visit: [Updated eligibility for oral COVID-19 treatments](#).

Pre-exposure prevention of COVID-19

Medicine is available for the prevention of COVID-19 in people who are at risk of COVID-19 infection and are severely immunocompromised. This is known as pre-exposure prevention of COVID-19.

For more information about pre-exposure prevention of COVID-19, visit:

[COVID-19 treatments](#)

[Updated eligibility for oral COVID-19 treatments](#)

[Making decisions about your treatment and care if you have COVID-19](#)

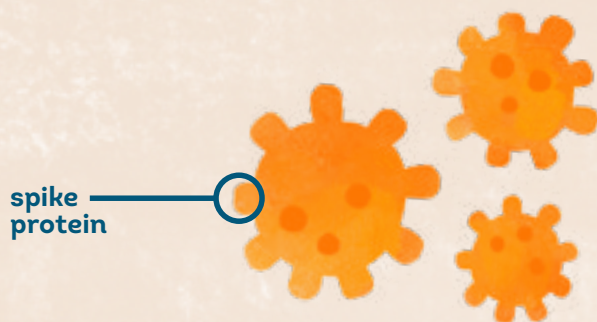
It is important to receive all recommended doses to help properly protect yourself against COVID-19.

For more information, speak with your healthcare team.

How have the COVID-19 vaccines been tested?

Australia has strict rules for testing and approving vaccines. The Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) checks a vaccine's safety, quality and effectiveness. The COVID-19 vaccines currently available in Australia had to pass these checks before they could be approved.

For more information, visit [How COVID-19 vaccines are tested and approved](#) on the Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care website.



spike protein

Should I have a COVID-19 vaccine?

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people affected by cancer, the decision about whether (and when) you receive a COVID-19 vaccine should be made by you, together with your healthcare team. Things you need to consider include:

- The type of cancer you currently have or have had in the past
- The type and timing of treatment you are receiving now or have received in the past (e.g., when in your chemo cycle it is best to get the vaccine), and
- How your immune system is working.

If I don't have a COVID-19 vaccine, what are the risks?

People who have been diagnosed with cancer and are going through cancer treatments can have weaker immune systems. This makes you more at risk of getting COVID-19.

The COVID-19 vaccine will help protect you from becoming very sick if you get COVID-19. It will also help prevent you from spreading COVID-19 to your family and community.

For more information about your individual risks, speak to your healthcare team.

Who will give the COVID-19 vaccine to me?

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people affected by cancer, the decision about who will give their COVID-19 vaccine may be made on an individual basis by the person affected by cancer together with their healthcare team.

COVID-19 vaccines are available through Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services, General Practitioners (GPs), Commonwealth Vaccine Clinics and state and territory vaccination clinics. Only qualified healthcare professionals who have completed a special COVID-19 vaccine training program can give the COVID-19 vaccines.

For more information, visit [How will I get my COVID-19 vaccine?](#) on the Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care website.

To find vaccination locations and book an appointment, visit the [COVID-19 Vaccine Clinic Finder](#).

What are the side effects of the COVID-19 vaccines?

In general, common side effects from the COVID-19 vaccines are similar to those of other vaccines, including:

- pain, redness and/or swelling where you received the needle
- muscle pain/aches
- mild fever
- headache
- tiredness.

These side effects are usually mild and usually go away within one or two days. However, if you experience any serious side effects after receiving the vaccine, you should seek help from a healthcare professional.

Currently, there is no evidence to suggest that people with cancer will experience different or worse side effects from the COVID-19 vaccines.

Because of a rare side effect of blood clotting with the AstraZeneca vaccine, the Pfizer, Moderna or Novavax vaccines are preferred in adults aged under 60 years. However, people who have had the first dose of the AstraZeneca vaccine without any serious side effects can be given the second dose, including adults under 60 years.

What will happen after I have the vaccine?

All people who receive the COVID-19 vaccine should wait at least 15 minutes before leaving the health service in case a serious reaction occurs.

If you have a history of anaphylaxis (a severe allergic reaction) to anything, tell the health professional who is giving your vaccine to check if there are any risks for you to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. After receiving the vaccine, you should wait at least 30 minutes before leaving in case a serious reaction occurs.

After you have been vaccinated, it's still important to protect yourself against COVID-19. You can do this by doing things like wearing masks, washing your hands often with soap and water, using alcohol-based hand sanitisers when you can't use soap and water, cleaning and disinfecting things you use a lot (e.g., your phone, keys, wallets, travel and ATM cards), and paying with your card instead of using cash.



Additional information and resources



- Cancer Australia's detailed [Frequently Asked Questions about COVID-19 vaccines for people affected by cancer](#)
- The Agency for Clinical Innovation's shared decision making resources about COVID-19 vaccines: [Yarning to make health decisions together](#)
- National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO)'s [COVID-19 Vaccine Updates and Information](#)
- [Message from NACCHO Chair Donnella Mills on COVID-19 and the vaccines](#)
- [Professor James Ward answers important questions about the COVID-19 vaccines for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people](#)
- The Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care's [COVID-19 vaccines website](#)
- The Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care's [Information for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples about COVID-19 vaccines](#)
- The Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) [recommended COVID-19 doses and vaccines infographic](#)
- The Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care's [Side effects of COVID-19 vaccines \(Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples\) fact sheet](#)
- or speak with your healthcare team who can provide you with extra information and support.

PROTECT YOU AND YOUR COMMUNITY. WASH YOUR HANDS.



Wet your hands with water using soap



Rub your hands together with the soap



Scrub your hands together...



...for at least 20 secs



Rinse your hands under water



Dry your hands