



COVID-19 Vaccination Frequently Asked Questions and Answers

Sydney North Health Network recognises the rollout of the COVID-19 vaccine will be challenging. We want to provide as much support as possible to the general practices who will participate in the vaccine rollout program. We also want to provide practices with as much detail as possible, given the limited information we have received so far. As information comes to hand, we will share this directly with you through our normal communications channels. Please check your emails for the SNHN updates.

SNHN recently emailed a survey (link [here](#) and at the end of this document) to all general practices to assess readiness to provide the COVID-19 vaccine. Your responses will help us understand what support practices may need in the lead-up to rollout if your practice intends to participate in the program.

Below are some questions and answers that may assist you when getting enquiries or questions from patients about the upcoming COVID-19 vaccine rollout. The rollout is to be completed in a number of phases. These phases are highlighted in the Department of Health Roadmap which can be accessed [here](#) or via the link at the end of this document along with other relevant links.

There may be other potential options for people/your patients to have the vaccine and some of this will depend on which phase of the roadmap they will be allocated to. The first phase of the rollout is targeted to the most vulnerable populations and will be provided by localised hubs. Due to the Pfizer vaccine needing to be stored at -70° it has been necessary to set up these hubs to deliver the vaccine to the Phase 1a patients.

Questions and Answers

Is there a cost for the vaccine?

The COVID-19 vaccination will be free for all Medicare-eligible Australians and most visa-holders. The Commonwealth is looking at a COVID-19 vaccine-specific item number for GPs to ensure the vaccine and consultation to provide the immunisation remains free for all eligible Australians.

Will it be mandatory to have the vaccine?

Vaccination will not be mandatory, however it will be strongly recommended, especially for people in vulnerable groups – aged, chronic illness, etc.

How effective is the COVID vaccine?

Initial data has shown the Astra Zeneca (Oxford) vaccine to be 70% effective. Patients will need to have 2 doses of the vaccine to get the best protection, however even after the first dose of the Astra Zeneca vaccine they will have some protection from COVID.



Always remember that it is important to advise patients to continue to follow the COVID-safe guidelines even after either dose of the vaccine has been administered – “wash your hands thoroughly, maintain social distancing, get tested if you are unwell and wear a mask if required”.

How long after the first dose can the second dose be given?

The ideal timeframe for the second dose is 4 weeks but up to 12 weeks.

What if the second dose is not provided within the required timeframe?

There is no data available to provide this information at this stage.

Does the GP or Nurse giving the vaccine need to do special training?

The Commonwealth Dept of Health recognises GPs and practices nurses regularly provide vaccines to their patients, therefore they are seen as competent and well equipped to provide the COVID vaccine to their patients. There will be training provided to immunisers regarding the use of ‘multi-dose vials’.

How will a record of having the vaccination be managed?

Recording COVID-19 vaccinations into the Australian Immunisation Register (AIR) will be mandatory. This will be done in the usual manner in which general practices provide all other vaccination details to AIR. Patients can access their personal immunisation record via their MyGov account – choose the Medicare tile, then choose the ‘Immunisation History’ tile, then click on the ‘View History Statement’.

When will patients get the vaccine?

The program will be rolled out on the basis of identified priority populations. This information can be found on the Dept of Health roadmap – see link [here](#) or below.

What if a patient has a reaction to the vaccine?

Patients will need to remain at the practice and be monitored for 20 minutes post vaccination for severe reactions which will most likely occur in this timeframe. Some people may get the following post vaccination for several days:

- Tender area at the injection site including redness
- Feeling tired
- Headache
- Muscle aches

How safe is the COVID-19 vaccine?

The vaccines have met strict standards of safety, quality and effectiveness as required by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA). TGA is currently finalising the approval of the vaccines. The Pfizer vaccine will be approved first and is due for release in mid February. The Astra Zeneca (Oxford) vaccine is due to be approved a few weeks after that and is anticipated early to mid March. Australia has not had to cut short the approval process – all due diligence is being followed.



Where is the best location to have the vaccine?

There will be a number of options available to receive the vaccine:

- General practices will be administering the vaccine if they choose to do so
- A number of dedicated clinics will be providing the vaccine. Further information on these clinics will be provided by the Commonwealth Dept of Health.

Points to remember

- Immediately after receiving the first dose, patients must make an appointment to receive the second dose of the vaccine.
- At this stage we have no notification on the timing and delivery of the flu vaccine.
- Australia saw a low rate of flu transmission in 2020 due to COVID-safe practices including social distancing, hand hygiene practices, wearing of masks if required and isolation when this has been required. The timing of the 2021 flu vaccine rollout has not been determined yet.

Useful links

- [Australia's COVID-19 vaccine national roll-out strategy](#)
- [COVID-19 vaccine information for GPs](#)
- [What Australia's vaccine roadmap means for GPs](#)
- [RACGP President and Federal Health Minister unveil GPs' COVID vaccine role](#)
- <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-01-12/astrazeneca-pfizer-what-is-the-difference-in-covid-19-vaccines/13048284>
- <https://www1.racgp.org.au/newsgp>
- GP preparedness survey - [link](#)