

Version 2: 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 that will participate in any phase of the vaccine rollout program. We are providing regular updates as new information becomes available, sharing these directly with you through our normal communications channels. Please check your emails for updates from communications@snhn.org.au and also your SNHN support coordinator who is in regular contact with you.

Below are some questions and answers that may assist you when receiving 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 (an amended version of 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.

General Practice will be involved from Phase 1b of the rollout. An EOI process for GPs has been completed and practices will be informed of next steps over the coming weeks. The Commonwealth Department of Health, not PHNs, are making the decisions on which practices will be included throughout the rollout.

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, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the disability sector, 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.

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 Department 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 is specific training that will need to be completed by all COVID-19 vaccinators. There are two components to the training: a core module to be completed by all providers, followed by vaccine-specific training.

The training is being provided free to all authorised COVID-19 vaccination providers. These first modules are targeting health professionals in hospitals who will be administering the Pfizer vaccine. The core modules can be commenced at any time, however it is recommended to wait until the Astra Zeneca module becomes available.

The training can be accessed here: <https://www.health.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/covid-19-vaccines/covid-19-vaccination-training-program>.

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 ‘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 Department of Health roadmap – see link to amended version [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 15 minutes post vaccination for any reactions. 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 has been provisionally approved and is due for release in mid to late February. The Astra Zeneca (Oxford) vaccine is due for approval in the coming days with commencement anticipated for 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. The details of commencement of phase 1b in General Practice are still being defined and information will be provided as soon as it becomes available.
- A number of dedicated clinics will be providing the vaccine. Further information on these clinics will be provided by the Commonwealth Department of Health.

Can the flu vaccine be given at the same time as the COVID vaccine?

There needs to be a 14-day gap between administration of the COVID vaccine and the flu vaccine. Possible scenarios:

- **Scenario 1:** Dose 1 COVID vaccine – 14 days later a flu vaccine can be given, followed by the Dose 2 COVID vaccine 14 days after the flu vaccine.
- **Scenario 2:** Both doses of the COVID vaccine are administered. The flu vaccine can be administered 14 days after the second dose of the COVID vaccine is given.
- **Scenario 3:** Flu vaccine given first, then dose 1 of the COVID vaccine can be administered 14 days after.

Prior to administering the flu vaccine, please ensure you check if your patients have had the COVID vaccine, including which vaccine and which date/s.

How will I know if a patient has already had the vaccine?

All vaccines will be recorded in AIR. This will include details of when the patient had the vaccine, dose numbers, and which vaccine the patient received. If the patient has a My

Health Record, the vaccine will be recorded there – you can check the patient record in your clinical software. Patients can also download an app on their phone called 'Medicare Express Plus', which is available via the app stores relevant to their phone. This app links directly to the patient's myGov account and includes their immunisation history.

Will the Astra Zeneca/Oxford vaccine protect against new COVID-19 variants?

There are new variants of COVID-19 emerging. Studies of efficacy of vaccines against these variants are still in the early stages of data collection. It is recommended to continue to administer the vaccine. WHO information can be found here:

<https://www.who.int/news/item/08-02-2021-covax-statement-on-new-variants-of-sars-cov-2>

Does PPE need to be worn when administering the COVID vaccine?

As community transmission is currently very low, you should only need to use the normal PPE you would use when giving any vaccine. This may be subject to change if case numbers start to rise, and normal discretion and comfort levels should be taken into account.

Are there specific item numbers for administering the vaccines?

Medicare is finalising the new COVID-19 vaccine administration item numbers, which will be available soon including the item descriptors and claiming rules.

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](#)
- [Amended version of phased roll-out flowchart](#)
- [RACGP President and Federal Health Minister unveil GPs' COVID vaccine role](#)
- [RACGP News](#)
- [COVID-19 vaccination training program](#)
- [Sydney North Health Network COVID-19 page](#)
- SmartVax: <https://www.smartvax.com.au/>
- Living evidence: COVID-19 vaccines – <https://aci.health.nsw.gov.au/covid-19/critical-intelligence-unit/covid-19-vaccines>
- <https://www.who.int/news/item/08-02-2021-covax-statement-on-new-variants-of-sars-cov-2>