



Australian Government

COVID-19 VACCINATION

Disability Provider Alert

24 February 2021

Australia's COVID-19 Vaccination Program commenced on 22 February 2021.

The Department of Health has identified a small number of disability residential accommodation sites located in each jurisdiction to receive the first Phase 1a vaccinations in the first week.

- Sites are located across Australia in urban, regional and remote settings
- All providers involved in the first week rollout have been contacted
- People with disability living at these initial sites who want to be vaccinated will receive the Pfizer vaccine
- People who choose not to have the vaccine this week for any reason will have an opportunity to receive a vaccine at another time during the Phase 1a rollout period
- Workers at these initial sites will not be offered the vaccine during the first week. This will occur at a later date.

Locations and names of providers will not be disclosed for security and privacy reasons.

Next steps for Phase 1a

The Department of Health continues to collaboratively engage with key stakeholders to ensure the rollout is safe and fit-for-purpose for people with disability and their support workers.

The Department of Health, or a contractor engaged by the Department of Health, will directly contact disability residential accommodation providers to make arrangements for the rollout of the vaccines in coming weeks.

In the meantime, disability providers should:

- Discuss the COVID-19 Vaccination Program with people with disability, families, carers and workers including the benefits for them and others of getting the vaccine.
- Start working with people with a disability who are eligible for Phase 1a to seek informed consent. Where the person is usually supported to make decisions, providers should start working with those individuals around consent.
- Consulting with families and carers to engage people with a disability around the vaccine and complete consent issues well in advance of vaccination day.

Easy read information has now been published to help support these processes. See below.

Disability providers are also encouraged to do some preliminary planning and thinking about how the vaccination process might be managed at their sites, including identifying:

- An appropriate place for vaccinations to occur (for example an office space or dining room) that includes an area where people can wait to have the vaccine (for example a lounge/living room) and easy flow in between the two areas.
- An appropriate place for the vaccine team to be located where a private and confidential conversation can occur between the person giving the vaccine and the person receiving the vaccine (for example this could be the same room where the vaccinations occur).
- An appropriate place to monitor people who have received the vaccination for between 15 and 30 minutes (for example this could be the same as the waiting room so long as it is clear who has had the vaccine and who is waiting to have the vaccine).
- How to maintain COVIDSafe practices on vaccination day including physical distancing, hand hygiene and cleaning.
- What supports each person may need on vaccination day such as having a support person (carer, family member) present at the time of vaccination.

The Department of Health, or a contractor engaged by the Department of Health, will talk through how to be site ready once you are contacted. A checklist to support provider planning will also be made available.

Information about consent for people with disability and workers

People with disability and workers can choose whether they have the vaccine.

The COVID-19 vaccine is voluntary for all individuals at this stage. This is based on expert medical advice from the [Australian Health Protection Principal Committee](#).

All Australians are encouraged to have the COVID-19 vaccine.

Disability providers are encouraged to talk to the people with disability they support and their workers about having the vaccine. The vaccine is a way to protect people with disability, workers and the wider community.

What consent do people with disability need to provide before they have the COVID-19 vaccine?

All Australians must give [informed consent](#) before having the COVID-19 vaccine.

The Department of Health has developed a Consent Form that can be used by people with disability in residential settings in Phase 1a. However, it is not a requirement that this particular form is used.

Providers should adopt their usual consent processes to obtain informed consent. This may be your usual consent form or if there are specific requirements in your jurisdiction, these should be used. Written consent is not mandatory, but preferable.

What is important is that people with disability understand what they are agreeing to, that is, give informed consent. That is:

- Understand what the COVID-19 vaccine is and what it is for
- Understand the benefits of the vaccine
- Understand the risks of the vaccine.

It's important to keep a record of who has given consent to have the vaccine. You will need to provide evidence that informed consent has been given to the vaccination team.

What if someone cannot make the decision to have the vaccine themselves?

If someone is unable to make their own decision and have in place a substitute decision-maker in place (such as a legal guardian) or a person that usually supports the person with disability to make decisions, that person will need to consider the wishes and preferences of the person with disability around vaccination, and make the decision in accordance with the relevant laws in each jurisdictions.

The person with disability should actively be engaged in the discussion and decision whether to have the vaccine in line with [supported decision making](#) principles in each jurisdiction.

Can a person with disability or the person that supports them to make decisions talk to a GP or other health professional?

People with disability, their families, carers and substitute decision-makers may wish to engage with their GP or other health professionals to discuss the risks and benefits of the vaccine as well as whether it is appropriate for someone to receive the vaccine. This may assist in ensuring consent to have the vaccine is informed. Final consent is the decision of the person with disability and/or the person who supports them to make decisions.

Can a disability provider mandate the COVID-19 vaccine for workers?

Employers including disability providers have a duty as part of Work Health and Safety (WHS) laws to eliminate, or if that is not reasonably practicable, minimise the risk of exposure to COVID-19 in the workplace.

Safe Work Australia has issued [advice and information](#) to assist employers with their obligation under WHS laws.

Each individual disability provider needs to make a decision about whether there is a need to mandate the COVID-10 vaccine in their workplace.

Safe Work Australia's advice assists employers to assess whether a COVID-19 vaccine is a *reasonably practicable* control measure to manage the risks of COVID-19 in the workplace. It is unlikely that a requirement to be vaccinated will be reasonably practicable. It is expected most employers will not need to make vaccination mandatory to comply with the WHS laws.

Other considerations include:

- Not all disability workers will be able to have the vaccine straight away, some will need to wait their turn.
- Some disability workers may have a legitimate medical reason for not being vaccinated.

Disability providers need to comply with their relevant state/territory Public Health Orders in relation to the vaccine.

What if a worker does not want to support someone or work with other colleagues who have not had or are choosing not to have the vaccine?

Disability providers need to make decisions about the best approach. This needs to be undertaken in accordance with workplace entitlements and obligations under Australian work place laws. Disability providers will also need to consider the contractual arrangements in place with their workers.

Safe Work Australia has provided advice that under WHS laws, a worker can only cease or refuse to carry out work if the worker has a reasonable concern that to carry out the work would expose the worker to a serious risk to the worker's health or safety from an immediate or imminent exposure to a hazard. In most circumstances, a worker will not be able to rely on the WHS laws to cease work simply because another worker or person with disability isn't vaccinated, noting that other recommended infection control practices should already be in place now to manage the risk of COVID-19 transmission, however this will depend on the circumstances. If a person with disability or another worker chooses not to be vaccinated, the risk of infection can continue to be managed through the use of these recommended infection control practices.

If a registered NDIS provider or NDIS support worker refuses to continue to provide supports, it could be a breach of the [NDIS Code of Conduct](#) and a complaint can be made to the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission. Complaints are handled on a case-by-case basis and may involve consultation with the complainant and provider.

What if a person with disability only wants workers who have had a vaccine support them?

People with disability always have choices over who supports them. People with disability can ask the provider to make sure that the workers that they employ to support them are vaccinated. Alternatively, they may ask that where workers do not have the vaccine that they must adhere to other infection control measures to ensure the risk to the person and the worker remains low. Providers can play an important role in assisting people with a disability to understand how risks of COVID-19 transmission are being managed to inform decision making by the person with disability.

If a worker does not wish to be vaccinated, and the person they usually support indicates they only want to be supported by someone who has been vaccinated, the provider will need to make alternate support arrangements for the person with disability. This may mean identifying another support worker that meets the needs of the person with disability.

More information

Australian Government, state and territory government helplines will be have information on how people with disability can access the vaccine when they are available.

Call the National Coronavirus Helpline on 1800 020 080, and ask for an interpreter if needed

Visit the Department of Health's [Information for people with disability about COVID-19 vaccines webpage](#). This page will be updated regularly.

Visit the [Safe Work Australia website](#) to find Work Health, and Safety contact information in your jurisdiction.

A webpage for disability providers will be available soon.

Resources and information

The following resources and information are now available on the Department of Health website to assist you in your conversations.

Resources and information are being updated regularly as more details are known.

Providers involved in Phase 1a will also be provided with additional logistical resources once they are contacted.

- [Information for people with disability about COVID-19 vaccines](#)
- [Consent form for COVID-19 vaccination](#)
- [Information on COVID-19 Pfizer \(Comirnaty\) vaccine](#)
- [Preparing for COVID-19 vaccination](#)
- [After your COVID-19 vaccination](#)
- [ATAGI clinical guidance on COVID-19 Vaccine in Australia in 2021](#)
- [ATAGI immunisation provider guide to obtaining informed consent for COVID-19 vaccine](#)
- [COVID-19 vaccination decision guide for women who are pregnant, breastfeeding, or planning pregnancy](#)
- [Supporting people with intellectual or developmental disability to access health care during the COVID-19 pandemic](#)

Easy Read Fact Sheets

- [COVID-19 vaccine - Overview](#)
- [COVID-19 vaccine - What is it? Is it safe?](#)
- [COVID-19 vaccine - Who will get the vaccine?](#)
- [COVID-19 vaccine - Where can you get the vaccine?](#)
- [COVID-19 vaccine - The Pfizer vaccine](#)
- [COVID-19 vaccine - Getting ready for the vaccination](#)
- [COVID-19 vaccine - What to expect when you have your vaccination](#)
- [COVID-19 vaccine - Giving your consent](#)
- [COVID-19 vaccine - After your vaccination - Easy Read](#)
- [COVID-19 vaccine - Other information - Easy Read](#)

Auslan videos

- [About Australia's COVID-19 Vaccines - Auslan](#)
- [How COVID-19 Vaccines Work - Auslan](#)
- [COVID-19 Vaccine National Rollout - Auslan](#)
- [Approval of a COVID-19 Vaccine - Auslan](#)
- [The Making of Vaccines – Auslan](#)

Other resources

- [Information for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples about COVID-19 vaccines](#)
- [Information for aged care providers, workers and residents about COVID-19 vaccines](#)
- [Information in other languages.](#)