



Circular 2021/01 - COVID-19 vaccinations

Purpose

1. The purpose of this Circular is to provide information to Commonwealth agencies and their employees on the Australian Government's national roll-out of COVID-19 vaccinations.

National roll-out of vaccinations

2. The Australian Government is committed to the safe and effective roll-out of COVID-19 vaccinations to all Australians, including employees of the Australian Public Service (APS).
3. Australians can determine whether they are currently eligible to receive a COVID-19 vaccination using the [Vaccines Eligibility Checker](#) provided by the Commonwealth Department of Health.
4. Further information on each [COVID-19 vaccination roll-out phase](#), including those groups being prioritised, and any decisions of National Cabinet mandating vaccinations are also available on the Commonwealth Department of Health's [website](#). COVID-19 vaccinations are being made available to different populations, prioritised on medical grounds and risk profiles.
5. State and Territory health websites also publish local public health orders and restrictions, including requirements making COVID-19 vaccinations mandatory for groups of workers in high-risk industries.

Prioritisation

6. The roll-out of vaccinations has been developed by the Commonwealth Department of Health and is based on medical advice that prioritises individuals in Australia who are vulnerable to the coronavirus, are at increased risk of exposure, or who are working in jobs critical for managing the pandemic response.
7. COVID-19 vaccinations to Commonwealth employees based in Australia will be determined by their place in the roll-out phases, National Cabinet decisions and local public health orders making vaccinations mandatory in some circumstances.
8. Employees will receive access to the COVID-19 vaccination during the appropriate phase of the roll-out phase. Each phase prioritises population groups depending upon an individual's demographics or the characteristics of the work they perform. For example, elderly Australians or those working in quarantine and border security will be offered a vaccination ahead of younger Australians or those not in high exposure risk roles. The APS will be vaccinated in line with the criteria for the Australian population.
9. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Department of Defence are implementing their strategy for managing vaccinations for Australian Government employees and Defence personnel and their dependents who are currently deployed/posted, or are about to deploy or be posted, overseas.

Vaccination requirements

10. Vaccination is mostly voluntary and strongly encouraged in Australia. COVID-19 vaccination will be made available, free to everyone in Australia who chooses to be vaccinated.
11. The Government has said that it does not intend to make the COVID-19 vaccination mandatory for all Australians or for Commonwealth employees. However, State and Territory Governments may make public health orders requiring the vaccination of workers in high-risk workplaces or industries, including in support of decisions of National Cabinet. Commonwealth workers in a relevant high-risk category would also need to comply with these public health orders.
12. Decisions to require vaccination within particular workplaces or job roles is a matter for individual Agency Heads. Employment guidance is expected to be released by [Safe Work Australia](#) and the [Fair Work Ombudsman](#).
13. Agencies should be mindful of their obligations under work health and safety laws to ensure the health and safety of workers and others while at work, so far as it is reasonably practical.
14. Agencies should also remain mindful of their obligations under the *Privacy Act 1988*, noting that employers would not typically be able to require an employee to declare their vaccination status without consent, unless such a declaration is required by legislation or a state or territory health order.

Mandatory vaccinations

15. National Cabinet or State and Territory Governments may decide to make the COVID-19 vaccination mandatory for groups of employees in high-risk industries and settings.
16. In these circumstances, eligible APS employees are to comply with any applicable State and Territory public health orders making COVID-19 vaccinations mandatory.
17. On 28 June 2021, National Cabinet in accordance with advice provided by the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee agreed to make the COVID-19 vaccination mandatory for all residential aged care workers from 17 September 2021.

Support for employees

18. Where a roll-out phase or State and Territory public health order provides vaccination for a particular workforce or group, it is up to individual agencies to identify and support its relevant workforce to receive the vaccination.
19. Agencies should provide the greatest support possible to assist employees in receiving a COVID-19 vaccination, consistent with the Government's expectations. Appropriate support measures may include providing:
 - a. certification that particular employees fit a priority group for vaccination because of their work;
 - b. paid time to receive vaccinations, including reasonable travel time; and
 - c. reasonable travel expenses, where significant travel is required to access a vaccination site.

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20. Agencies may also wish to consider what support they may be able to offer employees with carer responsibilities.
 21. Employers are to provide advice and information to employees on vaccinations as it becomes available from the Commonwealth Department of Health [website](#).
 22. Agencies are to continue to meet their obligations under work health and safety legislation by consulting directly with employees and their representatives on matters of workplace health and safety.

Continuation of COVID-safe practices in workplaces

23. Vaccines will be a critical part of Australia's ongoing response to COVID-19 in tandem with physical distancing, hygiene and cleaning protocols, occupancy limits and modified workplace attendance arrangements. Vaccinations will complement existing prevention and control measures including those outlined in [Circular 2020/9: Returning to Usual Workplaces](#).
24. Agencies and employees are to continue monitoring public health requirements and maintain COVID-safe workplaces regardless of whether employees in the workplace are vaccinated. The Commonwealth Chief Medical Officer has confirmed the continuing importance of these measures in reducing the impact of COVID-19 on the community.
25. Agencies seeking further information should send enquiries to COVID19@apsc.gov.au.

Last reviewed: 13 July 2021