

# STAY STRONG GET VACCINATED

## COVID-19 vaccine FAQs for Aboriginal people in South Australia

This information is provided to you to help you make an informed decision about getting vaccinated against COVID-19.

You do not have to get vaccinated against COVID-19, but vaccination is the best way to protect you, your family, your community and your Elders.

### About the vaccine

#### How do the COVID-19 vaccines work?

The COVID-19 vaccines work by preparing your body to defend itself against COVID-19. When you are given the vaccine, some of your cells will read the vaccine's instructions, which shows them what the virus looks like. Once vaccinated, if you come into contact with COVID-19, your immune system will recognise it and be ready to defend your body against it.

#### Can the vaccine give me COVID-19?

No, you cannot catch COVID-19 from any of the vaccines.

#### Do the COVID-19 vaccines work on the new variants?

Global studies from real-world research have shown COVID-19 vaccines effective against all known strains of COVID-19.

#### Do the vaccines contain any animal products?

No, COVID-19 vaccines do not contain any animal products or egg.

#### Why should I get vaccinated?

COVID-19 can cause serious ongoing health problems, and sometimes death. The vaccine will give extra protection to you, your family, community and Elders and stop you from getting really sick or dying if you do get COVID-19. By getting the vaccine, it means we can catch up with family and friends at social gatherings, cultural events and go travelling.

#### Why does everyone in my community need to get vaccinated?

The vaccine gives extra protection to you, your family, community and Elders and reduces the community's risk of COVID-19 outbreaks. It will also help to reduce symptoms and side-effects if you catch COVID-19, protecting you from getting very sick or dying.

#### Do I have to get a COVID-19 vaccine?

No, you do not have to get a COVID-19 vaccine, but we strongly encourage you to get vaccinated.

COVID-19 can cause serious, long-term health problems, and sometimes death. Getting vaccinated is a safe way of protecting you, your family, community and Elders from COVID-19.

#### Are COVID-19 vaccines free?

The COVID-19 vaccines are free for all people in Australia.



# STAY STRONG GET VACCINATED

## Will I still get my Centrelink payments if I don't get the vaccine?

Your Centrelink payments will not change based on whether you choose to get the vaccine or not.

## How do I protect my family members and friends who can't be vaccinated?

By practicing social distancing (two big steps away from others), good hygiene, staying home and getting a COVID-19 test straight away if you feel sick, and not travelling to places unless you have to.

## Eligibility

### Who can get the COVID-19 vaccine?

COVID-19 vaccines are available to anyone aged 5 years and over.

### Can I still get a covid-19 vaccine if I don't have a Medicare card?

Yes, you can get the COVID-19 vaccine without a Medicare card at any SA Health COVID-19 Vaccination Clinic.

### I am immunocompromised. Should I have the vaccine?

Immunocompromised people are being prioritised to receive a COVID-19 vaccine because they are at increased risk of becoming very sick with COVID-19.

The COVID-19 vaccines do not contain the live COVID-19 virus, which means they are safe for immunocompromised people.

Immunocompromised people should follow the advice from their doctor about the COVID-19 vaccine, including when to get the vaccine between other treatments or medicines.

### Can my child aged 5 to 11 receive the COVID-19 vaccine?

The paediatric Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine is available for children aged 5 to 11 years, and a half-dose of Moderna is available to children aged 6 to 11 years.

[Bookings are available on our vaccination clinics and sites page.](#)

Children aged 5 to 11 will receive two doses, 8 weeks apart.

For more information, visit the [COVID-19 vaccination for children aged 5 to 11 page.](#)

### Is the COVID-19 vaccine safe for children aged 12 years and over?

Yes. Clinical trials of the mRNA COVID-19 vaccines (Pfizer and Moderna) found the vaccines effective for children aged 12 years and over.

It's important to vaccinate young people because they are now more at risk of catching and passing on COVID-19 due to the Omicron variant.



# STAY STRONG GET VACCINATED

## My child has a medical condition or disability, can they be vaccinated?

Children aged 5 and over should get vaccinated as soon as possible to protect them from getting very sick or going to hospital if they catch COVID-19.

Have a yarn with your trusted health care worker or doctor about the best time to get your child vaccinated.

Your doctor may refer your child to the specialist immunisation service at the [Women's and Children's Hospital](#).

For more information, visit Women's and Children's Hospital website and our [underlying medical conditions and immunocompromised page](#).

## Can I get the COVID-19 vaccines if I am pregnant or breastfeeding?

COVID-19 mRNA vaccines (Pfizer and Moderna) are safe if you are pregnant, breastfeeding or planning a family. Tens of thousands of healthy babies have now been born to vaccinated people, so we know they are safe.

Pregnant people can receive Pfizer and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines at any stage of pregnancy.

None of the available COVID-19 vaccines have the COVID-19 virus in them, so a COVID-19 vaccine cannot make anyone sick with COVID-19, including pregnant people or their babies.

Someone who is pregnant has a higher risk of becoming very sick if they catch COVID-19, possibly causing early delivery or miscarriage. Babies born to people with COVID-19 are more likely to need treatment in a newborn intensive care unit.

Vaccination is the best way to reduce the health risks for you and your baby.

If you are planning to get pregnant, you don't need to avoid getting pregnant before or after vaccination.

If you're breastfeeding, you can receive an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine (Pfizer or Moderna) at any time. You don't need to stop breastfeeding before or after vaccination.

If you are pregnant, have a yarn with your trusted health care worker or doctor about the best time to get vaccinated and best vaccine for you.

## Can I have the vaccine if I am planning to get pregnant? Can it cause fertility issues?

Any vaccines, including the COVID-19 vaccines, do not have any impact on fertility in women or men. Fertility issues are not a side effect and clinical trials show that COVID-19 vaccines do not affect fertility.

The Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) will not approve a vaccine for use in Australia unless it is safe and effective, including any impacts on fertility.

## Vaccination appointments

### Where can I get the COVID-19 vaccine in South Australia?

You can book your COVID-19 vaccination appointment with your doctor, at participating Aboriginal Controlled Community Health Services, at Respiratory Clinics, at SA Health vaccination clinics and participating pharmacies.



# STAY STRONG GET VACCINATED

People in remote South Australian Aboriginal communities will have the opportunity to get vaccinated either by their local doctor, Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service or other health services in the community.

To find a clinic or pharmacy near you, visit the [COVID-19 vaccine eligibility checker](#).

## Can I bring someone to my vaccination appointment with me?

You can have someone attend your vaccination appointment for support. This can be a support worker, family member, carer or friend.

Children under 16 years of age must come with a parent or caregiver.

## If consent is given beforehand and I change my mind on the day of vaccination, can I cancel?

Yes, receiving the COVID-19 vaccine is voluntary and you can change your mind at any time before receiving the first, second or booster dose of the vaccine.

## Will I get a record of my vaccination?

You can get your immunisation history statement or COVID-19 digital certificate to show proof of your vaccinations using:

- Medicare online account through myGov
- Express Plus Medicare mobile app.

If you don't have Medicare, you can request an Individual Healthcare Identifier (IHI) to get an immunisation summary through myGov.

Watch the [video on the Government of South Australia website](#) to learn how to add your COVID-19 digital certificate to the mySA GOV app.

For more information, visit [www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/covidvaccineproof](http://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/covidvaccineproof).

## Are there any side effects?

Vaccines, like any other medicines, can have reactions or side effects.

A side effect is something that sometimes happens to people after they take medicine. It is a sign that the vaccine is teaching your body how to fight the virus.

Side effects don't happen to everyone. Generally, they don't last longer than two days and you recover without any problems.

If you experience side effects after vaccination and are worried about them, you should speak to your doctor, clinic or medical service right away for advice.

Science shows that even the most serious side effects for any vaccine, including the COVID-19 vaccines, happen within just a few weeks and do not have late onset side effects. Several studies have found that vaccines cannot cause chronic conditions to happen years or decades after vaccination.

**Some common side effects** of COVID-19 vaccines are similar to those from the flu vaccine, and can include:

- pain, itchiness, redness and/or swelling where you received the needle
- aching or sore arm



# STAY STRONG GET VACCINATED

- tiredness
- headache
- sore muscles or joints
- fever and chills.

**Less common side effects** can include:

- feeling like you might vomit/sick in your stomach
- lumps in your neck
- pain in your leg
- not sleeping well.

If you have any side effects that bother you, you can take pain medicine. You can use the [COVID-19 Vaccine Side Effect Checker](#) if you have worries after having the COVID-19 vaccines.

If you are still worried or have general questions, call the National Coronavirus Helpline on [1800 020 080](#), 24 hours a day.

Some **extremely rare** but **serious side effects or reactions** such as **allergic reactions** and **anaphylaxis** have happened after the Pfizer and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines.

Someone should call **Triple Zero (000)** straight away if you have a serious reaction.

Signs of an allergic reaction/ anaphylaxis (usually happen within 15 minutes of being vaccinated):

- having trouble breathing or wheezing – this means you hear sounds you don't usually hear when you breathe
- a very fast heartbeat
- swelling of the face, mouth, tongue or throat
- falling down or fainting.

Some **very rare** and **generally mild cases** of myocarditis and pericarditis have been seen within 10 days of having the Pfizer and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines. See the [Therapeutic Goods Administration \(TGA\) statement](#).

Effects on the heart from COVID-19 are much more common and usually more severe than the rare effects from vaccination. Go to your health clinic if you have any signs of myocarditis or pericarditis, especially 1-5 days after vaccination:

- chest pain or pressure
- feeling an uneven heartbeat
- falling down or fainting
- having trouble breathing.

Side effects usually don't last long and go away with rest, but some people may need help in hospital.

A **very rare side effect** called **thrombosis with thrombocytopenia (TTS)** involves blood clots. If you have any of these side effects 4-30 days after having an AstraZeneca vaccine, go to your health clinic straight away:

- a bad headache or bellyache that doesn't go away for a long time, even with pain medicine
- blurry vision
- difficulty talking



# STAY STRONG GET VACCINATED

- feeling tired and confused (not sure of what's happening around you)
- a seizure (a 'fit')
- having trouble breathing or wheezing – this means you hear sounds you don't usually hear when you breathe
- chest pain
- swelling in your leg
- numbness (not much or no feeling) or tingling in arms and/or legs
- tiny blood spots under the skin, not near where the needle went in.

You can use the [COVID-19 Vaccine Side Effect Checker](#) if you are worried about symptoms after being vaccinated. If you have any general questions or concerns, you can also call the National COVID-19 Vaccine Helpline 24 hours a day on 1800 020 080.

## Second dose

### What is the timing between the two doses of COVID-19 vaccine?

When you get your first dose of the vaccine, you will be asked to make an appointment for your second dose.

The Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) and the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) recommend this much time between COVID-19 vaccine doses:

#### Children 5 - 11 years

- Paediatric [Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine](#) – 8 weeks

#### People 12 years and over

- [Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine](#) – 8 weeks
- [Moderna COVID-19 vaccine](#) – 8 weeks

#### People 18 years and over

- [Novavax COVID-19 vaccine](#) – 3 weeks
- [AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine](#) – 8 to 12 weeks (4 weeks at a minimum)

If the time between doses is more than what's shown, the second dose should be given as soon as possible.

## Third and booster doses

### Who is eligible for a COVID-19 vaccine booster?

COVID-19 vaccine booster doses are recommended to maintain immunity against the virus.

People aged 16 to 17 can have the Pfizer COVID-19 booster vaccine and people aged 18 and over can have the Pfizer or Moderna booster COVID-19 vaccine 3 months after they have their second dose.



# STAY STRONG GET VACCINATED

You can receive your booster dose at participating Aboriginal Controlled Community Health Services, SA Health vaccination clinics, pharmacies, and respiratory clinics.

## Can I get a COVID-19 vaccine booster dose while pregnant?

Yes.

All people aged 16 and over who have had their second dose at least 3 months ago are eligible for a COVID-19 booster dose, including those who are pregnant.

People aged 16 to 17 can have the Pfizer COVID-19 booster vaccine and people aged 18 and over can have Pfizer or Moderna booster COVID-19 vaccine.

## I am immunocompromised, can I get a third dose of the COVID-19 vaccine?

Yes. ATAGI recommends that people aged 5 years and over who are severely immunocompromised have a third dose of a COVID-19 vaccine. This is to increase immunity to as close as possible to the general population.

A third dose of a COVID-19 vaccine can be given by your doctor, a health care worker, at SA Health vaccination clinics or at a pharmacy. You must bring evidence that you are eligible.

This can include:

- A referral letter from your doctor or health care worker
- Proof of an alternative medical record that is dated within the last 5 years, this can include:
  - a printout of your medical history (from clinical records or MyHealth Record)
  - a printout of a chronic disease care plan from your doctor
  - a discharge summary from a hospital or other health care clinic
  - a named script for a medicine to treat one or more of the relevant conditions or procedures outlined in the guideline.
- Something that easily identifies your condition
- A completed [Eligibility Declaration Form](#) (if you don't have the above evidence of eligibility).

For more information about the recommendations and eligible conditions, read the [ATAGI statement](#) and visit the [underlying medical conditions](#) page.

## I am immunocompromised, do I need a COVID-19 vaccine booster?

The Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) recommend people aged 16 and over who received a third dose due to severe immunocompromise, receive a winter (fourth) dose 3 months after their third dose.

For more information, visit our [underlying medical conditions and immunocompromised page](#).

## Vaccination after testing positive for COVID-19

### Do I need to get vaccinated if I have already had COVID-19?

Yes. You can be reinfected with COVID-19 and vaccination continues to be our best defence against COVID-19.

All people should wait for 3 months after confirmed COVID-19 infection before they receive their next COVID-19 vaccine dose. The next scheduled dose should then be given as soon as possible after this period.



# STAY STRONG GET VACCINATED

## After receiving the COVID-19 vaccine

### Can I take my usual medicines if I get the COVID-19 vaccine?

Yes, you can continue to take your usual medicines if you get the COVID-19 vaccine and this way you will stay as healthy as possible.

### Can I have the flu vaccine at the same time as a COVID-19 vaccine?

Yes. The COVID-19 vaccine and the influenza (flu vaccine) can be given on the same day.

COVID-19 vaccines can also be given at the same time as other vaccines including childhood and adolescent vaccines. Speak to your doctor or vaccine provider for more information.

Getting the influenza (flu) vaccine every year is important to protect yourself, your family and your community.

### How long does it take for the COVID-19 vaccine to protect me?

For the best protection, you need two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine. After the first dose you have partial protection against COVID-19 after 12 days. The second dose encourages the body to create stronger protection against the virus that causes COVID-19. People are protected 14 days after their second dose.

### How long will the COVID-19 vaccine protect me for?

After a person receives two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine, they are protected against severe COVID-19 symptoms and sickness. Booster doses are required to keep up your immunity much like your regular flu vaccine booster.

The Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) is watching ongoing research to understand how the vaccines work over time and how effective they are with new strains of the virus.

Even if you have been vaccinated, you should continue with good hygiene and physical distancing, using the COVID SAfe QR Check-In, getting tested if you have symptoms and staying home if you are sick.

### Can I still catch COVID-19?

Yes, you may still be able to catch or spread the virus, but COVID-19 vaccines reduce your risk of getting very sick or dying from COVID-19 by close to 90%. It is still possible to catch COVID-19 even if you have been vaccinated or had COVID-19 before.

Vaccination protects you by:

- reducing your chance of catching COVID-19 by 60-80%.
- giving you 90% protection against hospitalisation or death from COVID-19 if you are infected.
- reducing the spread of COVID-19 by over 90%.

This means everyone needs to get vaccinated and you cannot rely on others getting vaccinated to protect yourself. It is very important that we continue practising good hygiene and physical distancing, using the COVID SAfe QR Check-In, getting tested if we have symptoms and staying home if we're sick.



# STAY STRONG GET VACCINATED

## Do I still need to practice COVID safe behaviours?

Yes.

Even if you get the COVID-19 vaccine, you still need to keep up with COVID safe behaviours such as socially distancing (two big steps away from others), practicing good hygiene, staying home if you are feeling sick and not travelling to places in your community, or other communities unless you have to.

## I'm vaccinated, do I still need to have a COVID-19 test if I have COVID-19 symptoms?

Yes.

You should still have a COVID-19 test if you have COVID-19 symptoms, no matter how small.

Symptoms include fever or chills, cough, sore throat, runny nose, shortness of breath, loss of taste or smell, tiredness, or diarrhoea and vomiting.

It is still possible to catch COVID-19 even if you have been vaccinated. You could pass it on to people and make them very sick.

Get tested to stop the spread in the community.

## Safety, testing and trials

### Who decides if the COVID-19 vaccines are safe?

The **Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA)** and the **Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI)** decide if a vaccine is safe and approved for use in Australia.

The TGA is part of the Australian Government Department of Health and is responsible for regulating therapeutic goods including prescription medicines, vaccines, sunscreens, vitamins, medical devices, blood and blood products.

ATAGI is a group of medical experts who advise the Australian Government. They helped develop the national rollout plan for the COVID-19 vaccines and continue to provide clinical advice on the use of COVID-19 vaccines in children, pregnant women, and older people. The Australian Government monitors the safety and efficacy of all vaccines very closely and has already made changes to the COVID-19 vaccine rollout to keep Australians safe.

### How were the COVID-19 vaccines developed and approved so quickly?

Because so many people all over the world were being affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, everyone worked together to find a safe and effective vaccine. This included:

- **Money:** Lots of money from governments around the world helped vaccine developers move quickly.
- **Technology:** Technology has evolved to make vaccine development faster than in the past.
- **Spread of disease:** Clinical trials progress more quickly if a disease is widespread, which is the case for COVID-19. This means researchers can evaluate the effect of a vaccine between the unvaccinated and vaccinated groups much sooner than for a rare disease.



# STAY STRONG GET VACCINATED

## Is the vaccine being tested on me?

No. Human trials for the vaccine were done before the vaccines were approved and used tens of thousands of volunteers from around the world. The trials are now finished and based on the results, the vaccines that were proved safe and effective are being used.

Even though the COVID-19 mRNA vaccines are the first mRNA vaccines to be approved for use, the same vaccine technology that is used in the COVID-19 vaccines has been used in human trials since at least 2011.

Around the world, more than half of the world's population has now been vaccinated against COVID-19.

## Is the vaccine safe for older people?

Yes. It's really important that our Elders are protected from COVID-19. Older adults were prioritised for COVID-19 vaccination, as they are at increased risk of becoming really sick or dying with COVID-19. All available vaccines in Australia are suitable for use in older people.

In rare cases, doctors or health care workers will consider the suitability of vaccination in older people if they are very frail, have severe pre-existing conditions or are at the end of their life. Elders and their families and carers can talk to their doctor, clinic or medical service about the COVID-19 vaccines.

## Where can I find more information?

For information about the use of the COVID-19 vaccine in South Australia, visit [www.covidvaccine.sa.gov.au](http://www.covidvaccine.sa.gov.au)

For more information about the COVID-19 vaccines, visit the Australian Government Department of Health website.

The National Coronavirus Helpline is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week on 1800 020 080.

