



COVID-19 Vaccine Questions and Answers

Updated September 2, 2021.

You can check when you will be eligible for a COVID-19 vaccine by using the Vaccine Eligibility Checker covid-vaccine.healthdirect.gov.au/eligibility

To book go to flhealthcare.com.au/ballinavax or call 6685 6326

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Frequently asked questions



What is a COVID-19 vaccine?

A vaccine is a type of medicine that helps your body's immune system to fight infections. Vaccines are created in a way that prevent or reduce the severity of illness that may develop after an infection. Vaccines are not used to treat the infection once you have caught it.

How do the vaccines work?

After having a vaccine, your body creates antibodies to protect you from that infection. If you have the COVID-19 vaccine and are exposed to the virus that causes COVID-19 in the future, your immune system will respond faster and better against the virus, to help protect you from disease.

How do I get vaccinated in our area?

Our Ballina Vaccination Clinic is currently taking bookings for both AstraZeneca and Pfizer vaccinations (please note there are significant wait times at present for Pfizer). Vaccine bookings can be made online through our First Light Healthcare website, www.flhealthcare.com.au/ballinavax/

Which vaccine is suitable for which age group?

For more vaccination clinics, contact your local GP or pharmacist or go to <https://www.nsw.gov.au/covid-19/health-and-wellbeing/covid-19-vaccination-nsw/get-your-covid-19-vaccination-nsw>

From September 13, all Australians over 12 years of age will be eligible for a Covid-19 vaccine

Ages 12 to 17, Pfizer only.

Ages 18 – 59, Pfizer or AstraZeneca may be administered. Speak to your GP regarding suitability

Ages 60+ – AstraZeneca only, unless you meet the [exemption criteria](#).

Pregnant or breastfeeding women, any age – Pfizer only.

Do you have a cancellation list for Pfizer vaccine?

Due to the high volume of interest in appointments for the Pfizer vaccine, it is not possible to maintain a cancellation list. We strongly encourage anyone wanting to make an appointment to check the bookings page frequently for availability.

If you are a Healthcare/Frontline worker, work with NDIS or have a chronic disease please speak to our staff regarding your situation.

Will I need a booster vaccine, if so when?

It is not yet known how long the COVID-19 vaccine protection will last or when a booster vaccine will be rolled out in Australia. Currently, the main focus is getting the majority of the population vaccinated with their first and second shots by the end of this year.

To be fully vaccinated in the initial vaccine roll out, a person must have two doses of the same vaccine, given at the appropriate dosing schedule. To keep track of any new developments regarding a booster vaccine please go to the Australian Government Department of Health website, www.health.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/covid-19-vaccines/is-it-true/is-it-true-will-we-need-to-get-a-covid-19-booster-shot-each-year

How effective are the COVID-19 vaccines?

The COVID-19 vaccines approved for use in Australia have been shown to be **extremely safe and effective at preventing people from getting COVID-19**. The vaccines are particularly effective in preventing people from becoming severely ill, needing hospitalisation and dying from the disease.

Do I need a referral from my doctor to get the COVID-19 vaccine?

No.

What are the local vaccination rates for Ballina and Byron Bay?

Byron Bay – postcode 2481

- At least 1st dose 40% – 49%
- Fully vaccinated 20% – 29%

Ballina – postcode 2478

- At least 1st dose 60% – 69%
- Fully vaccinated 30% – 39%

Our region has an above average rate of vaccinations in comparison to other states NSW.

To check vaccination rates in your postcode go to the abc.net.au website, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-08-18/nsw-covid-19-vaccination-map/100387416#checkyourpostcode>

What do higher vaccination rates mean?

Higher vaccination rates make outbreaks much less likely. It reduces the need for preventive measures, such as border closures and travel restrictions.

This will reduce the health, social and economic impacts of COVID-19 pandemic.

A higher rate of vaccinations will also help to protect vulnerable people in our community who cannot be vaccinated, such as very young children or people who are too sick.

If a vaccine has, for example, 70% efficacy, it means a person vaccinated is around two-thirds less likely to develop the disease than someone who didn't get the vaccine.

For further information on why you should get vaccinated please go to the Australian Government Department of Health website, <https://www.health.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/covid-19-vaccines/getting-vaccinated-for-covid-19/why-should-i-get-vaccinated-for-covid-19>

How long do I need to wait in between doses?

The recommended time for AstraZeneca vaccine is 4 to 12 weeks.

The recommended time for Pfizer vaccine is 3 to 6 weeks.

Can I bring my second vaccination appointment forward?

You will only be able to bring forward your second dose if we have an earlier appointment available. Unfortunately due to the high demand it is quite rare that we can bring forward these appointments.

If I had my first vaccine elsewhere can I still book in my second dose with you?

Yes, even if you had your first vaccination at another clinic you are able to book in your second dose with us at flhealthcare.com.au/ballinavax

Is the COVID-19 vaccine free?

The vaccine is free for all Australian citizens, permanent residents, and most visa-holders.

Does COVID-19 vaccine protect me immediately?

Around two to three weeks after you receive your first dose of the vaccine you should have some protection from COVID-19, but you need to have a second dose to have lasting protection.

Are there serious side effects that I should be aware of related to the COVID-19 vaccines?

Most people who receive the COVID-19 vaccines only experience mild side effects. It is not uncommon for a day or two after the vaccine to have a sore arm, maybe a little bit of redness or swelling where the vaccine has been administered. Some people may experience some fatigue, or some aches and pains, or mild fever for a day or two after the vaccine. And some people may get a mild headache. These symptoms only last for a day or two. It is important to have lots of fluids and to take some mild painkillers like paracetamol or ibuprofen if you have these symptoms and they are worrying you.

But these symptoms go away.

The most serious side effect we are concerned about with both the AstraZeneca and the Pfizer vaccines is the risk of allergic reaction.

If you're going to have an allergic reaction, this occurs usually within a few minutes of receiving the vaccine.

And this is why we require you to wait for 15 minutes so you can be observed after you've had the vaccine to make sure you don't have one of these serious allergic reactions.

The allergic reactions can include what we call anaphylaxis, which is where people may have significant difficulty in breathing and fortunately, the people who are administering the vaccines, know how to manage this condition, so in the very rare times that this occurs it is able to be managed very safely and very quickly.

There are also some very rare long-term side effects from each of the vaccines.

For the AstraZeneca vaccine, our concern is the syndrome called thrombosis with thrombocytopenia syndrome, or TTS, also referred to as blood clots.

It is important if you have the AstraZeneca vaccine that you know the symptoms of this syndrome, so that if you develop any worrying symptoms, you can seek urgent medical attention.

A reminder that this syndrome usually occurs at least four days and up to one month after receiving the AstraZeneca vaccine, and is characterised by unusual and persistent headaches or abdominal pain often associated with other symptoms which may include things like the blurring of your vision, difficulty speaking, sometimes people get rashes as well. If you have these symptoms, it is very important that you seek urgent medical advice and attention. There is a very simple blood test we can do to exclude this condition, or if it is confirmed, then we know how to manage it. But a reminder that this is very rare and the risks of COVID-19, especially in the areas of Australia where we are currently seeing outbreaks, are far more significant than the risks of this side effect

Source: Michael Kidd, Deputy Chief Medical Officer, Australian Government Department of Health

What are the long-term side effects of having the vaccine?

Most side effects are immediate and short term, such as a sore arm at the injection site.

There is no current evidence that suggests the vaccine will result in any long-term side effects.

Will the vaccine affect my fertility?

There is no evidence to suggest any vaccines, including the COVID-19 vaccines, have any effect on male or female fertility.

Is it safe to get vaccinated if I'm pregnant, if I'm planning to become pregnant or if I'm breastfeeding?

Yes. The Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation, ATAGI, is recommending that all people who are planning to get pregnant, are pregnant or are breastfeeding get vaccinated against COVID-19, and all pregnant people are eligible right now to get the Pfizer vaccine.

What we know is that if pregnant people become infected with COVID-19, there is an increased risk of serious disease, both for the mother and for the unborn child, so it is important that we are protecting those who are pregnant in our community. What we also know is there is no evidence of any problems with receiving the Pfizer vaccine for those who are planning to become pregnant or those who are breastfeeding.

Source: Michael Kidd, Deputy Chief Medical Officer, Australian Government Department of Health

Why is a vaccine needed if we can do other things, like physical distancing and wearing masks, to prevent the virus that causes COVID-19 from spreading?

Currently there is no treatment available against COVID-19. Public health measures have focused on containing the spread of the disease through physical distancing measures, early case detection, isolation of cases and contacts and increasing health system capacity. Immunisation is likely to be an additional measure to help in preventing the disease and protecting the community against COVID-19.

How were these vaccines developed so quickly?

In response to the global epidemic of COVID-19, there has been unprecedented funding and collaboration between regulators, governments, vaccine developers and scientists to develop COVID-19 vaccines. Although COVID-19 vaccine trials have been set up much more quickly than would have previously been possible, this does not mean that safety assessment has been compromised. In fact, most of the vaccines being developed have now included tens of thousands of people in their trials, totalling nearly one quarter of a million people being involved in trials altogether.

Will the COVID-19 vaccines be effective on new variants of the virus?

Clinical trials, so far, are showing that the COVID-19 vaccines induce antibodies that are likely to be able to respond to most minor changes in the virus' gene sequence. Australia will continue to closely monitor international developments regarding the COVID-19 variants of concern and will continue to perform careful genetic examination of the virus found in local cases.

If I have already had COVID-19 and recovered, do I still need to get vaccinated with a COVID-19 vaccine when it's available?

Due to the risk of re-infection with COVID-19, it is recommended that individuals should be vaccinated regardless of whether they have already had COVID-19 in order to reduce the risk to yourself and the community. Current advice is that people who have previously had COVID-19 or been infected with the SARS-CoV-2 virus without symptoms can receive the vaccine as long as the person is not acutely ill and does not have any specific medical reason why they should not get the COVID-19 vaccine.

What should I do if I have concerns about the vaccine before I get vaccinated?

If you have questions or concerns about COVID-19 vaccination, you should review the information on the Australian Government website. If you still have concerns and you have been offered an appointment for COVID-19 vaccination, you should contact your GP prior to your appointment to discuss your concerns.

Why should I get vaccinated when I still might catch COVID-19 or pass it on to other people?

This is a really important question. What we know about the vaccines that we have available in Australia for COVID-19 is that they protect you from becoming seriously unwell and the risk of dying from COVID-19.

There is still the chance that someone who has been fully vaccinated may be able to be infected with COVID-19 and the chance that they may be able to transmit COVID-19 to other people.

But what we know is for those who are vaccinated, that risk is lower, so if you have been vaccinated and you contract COVID-19, there is a lower risk of you passing COVID-19 on to somebody else.

But most importantly, you are protected against serious illness and death from COVID-19.

Source: Michael Kidd, Deputy Chief Medical Officer, Australian Government Department of Health

Where will my vaccination be registered?

All vaccinations, including the date of vaccination, will be recorded on the Australian Immunisation Register. Vaccination records will be available through MyGov

and My Health Record, and the Australian Government is working to enhance existing digital and non-digital options. Additionally, the NSW Health systems will allow NSW Health to identify staff who are due their second dose of the vaccine.

Where can I get a copy of my immunisation history?

You can obtain your immunisation history through your Medicare online account through myGov, alternatively you can call **1800 653 809** if you wish to receive a copy of your immunisation history in the mail.

Do I have to book in my second vaccination dose myself?

No, second dose bookings will be arranged by our Nurses for you once you have received your first vaccination. Our Nurses have special access to our booking schedule so no one will miss out on their second dose appointments.

Who gets my personal details for the COVID vaccine and how will this information be used?

Information collected as part of the COVID-19 vaccination consent process will be subject to the same use and disclosure rules as other health information collected by the NSW Public Health System. Your personal and health information may be used and disclosed for purposes connected with the rollout of the COVID-19 vaccine program, including sharing your information with the Australian Government and for surveillance, assessment and monitoring of the COVID-19 vaccine or vaccination program. Your personal information held in NSW Health's database such as name, phone number and email address may be used to contact you following your vaccination for monitoring purposes. You may receive an SMS message or an email in the days following your vaccination and further direct follow up by NSW Health staff. If you are being offered vaccination on the basis of the type of work that you do, your employer may be contacted about your vaccination dates so that they can appropriately schedule staff at the workplace.

Will the COVID-19 vaccine also protect me against the flu?

The COVID-19 vaccine will not protect you against influenza (flu). Follow the guidance of your GP or health professional about when is best to schedule each dose of the COVID-19 vaccine (two doses in total) and the flu vaccine.

Do I need to get both the influenza vaccine and the COVID-19 vaccine?

As always, everyone in NSW will be encouraged to also have their flu vaccination once the latest seasonal flu vaccine is available.



Is there anything I can do while I wait for my turn?

It is important to continue to protect yourself and others against COVID-19. Even when the vaccine starts to become available to the general community in NSW, **it will still be important to practise COVID safe behaviour.** While you wait to be vaccinated for COVID-19, there are some things you can do to get ready.

Make sure your details are up to date with Medicare. You can do this using either your:

- Medicare online account through myGov
- the Express Plus Medicare app
- calling the Medicare program.

If you don't have your account set up, you can:

- enrol in Medicare, if you're not already enrolled
- set up your Medicare online account if you're enrolled in Medicare, but don't have Medicare linked to myGov
- get an Individual Health Identifier (IHI), if you're not eligible for Medicare.

Once you've had your vaccine, you'll be able to get an immunisation history statement to prove your vaccination status. You can get proof of vaccinations from your Medicare immunisation history through myGov, or by calling Medicare on **1800 653 809**.

Credit: NSW Department of Health

Update on the Moderna vaccine

The Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) has provided provisional approval for the use of the Moderna vaccine in Australia. The Moderna vaccine has been approved for use in adults aged 18 years and above, and Australia already has an advanced order for the Moderna vaccine with 25 million doses expected to come into the country.

The first million doses are expected to arrive during September, and there will be more details over the coming weeks about how those doses will be administered and who they will be administered to.

Australia then expects to receive up to 10 million doses before the end of this year and then 15 million doses as booster shots which will be coming into Australia in the first half of next year.

As with all our vaccines, the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation, ATAGI, will be providing the recommendations on who the vaccine is recommended for. The Moderna vaccine is similar to the Pfizer vaccine in that it is one of the new mRNA class of vaccines. It has similar action to the Pfizer vaccine and also similar side effects to the Pfizer vaccine as well.

Source: Michael Kidd, Deputy Chief Medical Officer, Australian Government Department of Health

Why is AstraZeneca changing its name to Vaxzevria?

This is causing a little bit of confusion.

The Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) has approved an application by AstraZeneca to change the name of their COVID-19 vaccine being used in Australia from AstraZeneca to Vaxzevria, which is what it is called in other parts of the world, particularly in Europe and in North America. This will be important so our vaccines here in Australia are seen to be the exact same, the equivalent of the vaccines being used in other parts of the world.

There is absolutely no change to the vaccine itself, it is still exactly the same vaccine. All that will be changing is the name of the vaccine, and that will be commencing late in 2021. For more information about this, you can go to the Therapeutic Goods Administration website, www.tga.gov.au

Source: Michael Kidd, Deputy Chief Medical Officer, Australian Government Department of Health

Why is testing important?

COVID-19 Testing is important as it helps health authorities track the spread of the virus through the community. Early diagnosis means you can take steps to avoid spreading the virus further to your friends and family. Early diagnosis can also help reduce hospitalisations, easing the pressure on our health system.

For more information regarding the importance of COVID-19 testing check out the Australian Government Department of Health website, <https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2020/08/testing-for-covid-19.pdf>

What is the Doherty report and what does this report entail?

The Doherty Institute (The Peter Doherty Institute for Infection and Immunity) was asked to prepare a report for consideration by the national cabinet.

This report is designed to advise on a National Plan to transition Australia's National COVID-19 response. For more information about this proposed plan, you can go to the Australian Government Department of Health website, www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/doherty-institute-modelling-report-to-advise-on-the-national-plan-to-transition-australias-national-covid-response

How can we move out of lockdown?

Although the situation is changing rapidly, most experts agree that in order to successfully move out of lockdown situations we will need to reach an 80% vaccination rate in our state.

Our best chances of staying out of lockdown in the future are to follow the COVID-19 safety measures; get vaccinated, if you have any COVID-19 symptoms get tested, check in with QR codes and wear a mask.

For more information regarding lockdowns and Covid safety measures please go to the NSW Government website, <https://www.nsw.gov.au/covid-19/rules/what-you-can-do-nsw>

The material available in this FAQ is distributed by First Light Healthcare as a general reference source, and sourced from [NSW Government](#), [NSW Health](#), and the [Therapeutic Goods Association](#).

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