YOUR GUIDE TO

THE COVID-19 VACCINE

INFORMATION FOR HEALTH CLINICS AND STAFF

#sleevesupNT

SLEEVES UP

NORTHERN
TERRITORY
GOVERNMENT

About the vaccine program

The Northern Territory Government is working closely with the Australian Government and Aboriginal and community health partners, to deliver the COVID-19 vaccine to all eligible Territorians.

The COVID-19 vaccines have been tested and approved by the Therapeutic Goods Administration and have been proven to be effective in protecting adults against COVID-19.

This is the largest and most complex vaccine roll-out ever seen in Australia.

The Northern Territory and Australian Governments are moving forward with a flexible approach to give Territorians timely access to the COVID-19 vaccine.

All people aged 12 years and over in the NT are now eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine.

It is important to continue practising good hygiene, physical distancing, staying at home when sick and getting tested when displaying any symptoms.

COVID-19 vaccines

Two COVID-19 vaccines have been approved by the Therapeutic Goods Administration for use in Australia.

The AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine is recommended for people 60 years and over and requires two doses between four to 12 weeks apart.

The Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine is recommended for people between 12 and 59 years of age and requires two doses between three to six weeks apart.

Two doses of the same vaccine is needed to ensure the best protection.

Safety, testing and trials

Scientists and health staff have been working together around the world to make the different COVID-19 vaccines.

The COVID-19 vaccines have been developed without compromising quality, safety and effectiveness. Vaccines must be tested many times in clinical trials to make sure they are safe.

Before a COVID-19 vaccine is approved for use in Australia, it must pass the Therapeutic Goods Administration's (TGA) rigorous assessment and approval processes. This includes assessment of its safety, quality and effectiveness.

For more information visit the TGA website: *www.tga.gov.au/covid-19-vaccines*

Vaccine roll-out

The COVID-19 vaccine is available at lots of different places. All people in the Northern Territory aged 12 years and over are eligible to receive the vaccine.

The community is able to get their COVID-19 vaccine by booking an appointment at a participating GP clinic, NT Health vaccine clinic, Danila Dilba Health Service vaccine clinic or the Palmerston Super Clinic.

Aboriginal adults can get the vaccine by contacting their local Aboriginal Health Clinic by phone or by walking in or at a participating GP clinic. NT Health is providing the vaccine to Aboriginal people in communities where it is the primary health care provider. Community information sessions are being held with Aboriginal communities to answer any questions they have about getting the vaccine. Following community engagement, the vaccine is provided to those who give consent.

At the COVID-19 vaccination appointment

Health professionals are encouraged to remind community members to bring their ID and Medicare card to their vaccine appointment. At the appointment, it is important health professionals take the time to answer any questions community members may want to ask about getting the vaccine.

Consent

Before getting the vaccine, community members will need to complete a checklist, that includes clinical safety questions such as consent and current medical conditions. Once this is completed health professionals can provide the COVID-19 vaccine.

Observation

Community members will need to wait 15 minutes for staff observation after they have received the COVID-19 vaccine to make sure there are no immediate side effects after getting the vaccine. It is important that health professionals inform community members about COVID-19 vaccine side effects.

Plan ahead for two doses

It is important to inform community members that they need to receive two doses of the same COVID-19 vaccine to ensure the best protection.

Health professionals are encouraged to book the second COVID-19 vaccination appointment for community members when they attend the health clinic to receive their first vaccine dose, particularly in urban settings.

In remote settings, health professionals should inform community members when they will receive their second vaccine dose and that the local clinic will notify the community when this is happening.

It's also important to inform community members they can get their second COVID-19 vaccination at participating health clinics or GPs across Australia.

After the vaccination

Side effects

As with any vaccine, the COVID-19 vaccine has some side effects. Side effects are normal and a good sign that the vaccine is working.

> **Common** side effects include:
>
> - pain or swelling at the injection site
> - tiredness
> - headache
> - muscle pain
> - nausea
> - redness or itching at the injection site
> - fever and chills
> - feeling unwell
> - joint pain

These side effects are usually mild and go away within one or two days.

Community members experiencing pain at the injection site, fever, headaches or body aches after vaccination, can take Paracetamol or Ibuprofen. If there is swelling at the injection site, a cold compress can be used.

> **Community members should seek medical attention after the vaccine if:**
>
> - They are having an allergic reaction or experiencing severe symptoms, such as difficulty breathing, wheezing, a fast heartbeat or collapsing.
> - They are worried about a potential side effect or have new or unexpected symptoms.
> - They are experiencing severe and on-going headaches.
> - They have an expected side effect of the vaccine which has not gone away after a few days.

Reporting adverse side effects

Health professionals must make a formal report on behalf of a community member if they suspect any adverse side effects from the vaccine. A formal report can be lodged online through the NT Health website.

Visit: *https://health.nt.gov.au/professionals/centre-for-disease-control/immunisation-health-professionals/recording-and-reports-on-immunisations*

Immunisation history

Vaccine history can be accessed from the Australian Immunisation Register. Health professionals can access a patient's COVID-19 vaccination history for them if requested.

Flu vaccine

Flu immunisation is a key priority in the national response to COVID-19 and it is important that community members still get the flu vaccine. This year, community members will need three vaccines to stay healthy – one flu vaccine and two COVID-19 vaccines.

The COVID-19 vaccine and the flu vaccine cannot be provided at the same time – there needs to be a seven day gap in between.

About the vaccine

- **Why should I get the COVID-19 vaccine?**

  COVID-19 can cause serious ongoing health conditions, and sometimes death.

  - In the UK one in every 34 people who got COVID-19 died
  - In Australia one in 32 people who got COVID-19 died

  The Australian population remains vulnerable to COVID-19 and most Australians have not yet been vaccinated and are not immune.

  Having the COVID-19 vaccine and getting immunised will help you protect yourself and your family and your community.

  It will save lives, keep Territorians in jobs and get life back to normal sooner.

  The COVID-19 vaccine reduces the community's risk of COVID-19 outbreaks. The more people that have the vaccine, the safer we will be.

  The COVID-19 vaccine is free and voluntary.

- **Do I get to choose what type of vaccine I get?**

  The AstraZeneca vaccine is recommended for people aged 60 years and over. The Pfizer vaccine is recommended for people aged 12 to 59 years.

- **How do vaccines work?**

  Vaccines work to strengthen a person's immune system by training it to recognise and fight against specific germs that can cause serious illnesses, like COVID-19.

  Vaccines insert weakened or inactivated virus into the body, so that the immune system can recognise these germs as being foreign and start to create antibodies to protect against future infection. Vaccines are a safe way of triggering an immune response in the body without causing illness.

  If you come into contact with the disease in the future, your body remembers it and your immune system works to quickly stop the disease from developing.

  You are far less likely to catch a virus or disease if you have been vaccinated. Immunisation not only protects you but protects your family and those in the community by reducing the spread of the virus.

Lynnette O'Bree from Central Australian Aboriginal Congress getting her COVID-19 vaccination

- ## What is in the COVID-19 vaccine?

Ingredients for the COVID-19 vaccines approved for use in Australia are listed on the Australian Register of Therapeutic Goods.

There is no formaldehyde or toxic substances in the approved COVID-19 vaccines.

Pfizer vaccine

Active ingredient (main ingredient):

- BNT162b2 [mRNA]

Other ingredients (inactive ingredients):

- ((4-hydroxybutyl)azanediyl)bis(hexane-6,1-diyl)bis(2-hexyldecanoate) (ALC-0315)
- 2-[(polyethylene glycol)-2000]-N,N-ditetradecylacetamide (ALC-0159)
- distearoylphosphatidylcholine (DSPC)
- cholesterol
- potassium chloride
- monobasic potassium phosphate
- sodium chloride
- dibasic sodium phosphate dihydrate
- sucrose
- water for injections

AstraZeneca vaccine

Active ingredient (main ingredient):

- One dose (0.5 mL) contains 5×10^{10} viral particles of (ChAdOx1-S a, b)

Other ingredients (inactive ingredients):

- histidine
- histidine hydrochloride monohydrate
- sodium chloride
- magnesium chloride hexahydrate
- disodium edetate (EDTA)
- sucrose
- ethanol absolute
- polysorbate 80
- water for injections

Australian Register of Therapeutic Goods
www.tga.gov.au/Covid-19-vaccines

Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine product information
www.tga.gov.au/covid-19-vaccine-pfizer-australia-comirnaty-bnt162b2-mrna

AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine product information
www.tga.gov.au/covid-19-vaccine-astrazeneca-chadox1-s

- **What to expect after your COVID-19 vaccination?**

  All medicines and vaccines can cause side effects and most of these are minor effects. However, if you do experience any side effects following vaccination and are worried, contact your GP.

  Common side effects after having the COVID-19 vaccine include:

  - pain or swelling at the injection site
  - tiredness
  - headache
  - muscle pain
  - nausea
  - redness or itching at the injection site
  - fever and chills
  - feeling unwell
  - joint pain

  These side effects are usually mild and go away within one or two days.

  If you experience pain at the injection site or fever, headaches or body aches after vaccination, you can take Paracetamol or Ibuprofen. If there is swelling at the injection site, you can use a cold compress.

  You should seek medical attention after vaccination if:

  - You think you are having an allergic reaction. Call 000 if you experience severe symptoms, such as difficulty breathing, wheezing, a fast heartbeat or collapsing.
  - You are worried about a potential side effect or have new or unexpected symptoms.
  - You are experiencing severe and on-going headaches.
  - You have experienced a side effect of the vaccine that has not gone away after a few days.

  For symptoms which are not urgent, you can see your regular healthcare provider.

- **What is herd immunity?**

  We reach 'herd immunity' when enough people are immunised to stop or slow the circulation of the disease across the community. This reduces the likelihood of infection, which then affords protection for people who can't be vaccinated.

  Experts believe a herd immunity of 65 percent or higher will be needed for COVID-19, but we cannot be certain at this stage.

- **Do I need to get the flu shot and the COVID-19 vaccine?**

  This year, you will need three vaccines to stay healthy – one flu vaccine and two COVID-19 vaccines. A seven day gap is recommended between getting the COVID-19 vaccination and the flu vaccination.

- **How is a COVID-19 vaccine given?**

  The vaccine is given by an injection into your upper arm by a health professional who has been trained in giving the COVID-19 vaccine.

- **Where do I get reliable information from?**

  The best thing you can do is to stay up-to-date with the latest information using reputable sources. The Australian Government will regularly be providing information along with NT Health and SecureNT.

  For more information visit the Australian Government Department of Health website or call the National COVID-19 Helpline.

  Northern Territory Government – Coronavirus: *www.coronavirus.nt.gov.au*

  Australian Government Department of Health: *www.health.gov.au*

  National COVID-19 Helpline: Phone 1800 020 080

Booking an appointment and eligibility

- **When will I get the COVID-19 vaccine?**

  All people in the Northern Territory aged 12 years and over are eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine.

  Bookings can be made online
  https://coronavirus.nt.gov.au

- **How will I get the COVID-19 vaccine?**

  The community is able to get their COVID-19 vaccine by booking an appointment at a participating GP clinic, NT Health vaccine clinic, Danila Dilba Health Service vaccine clinic or the Palmerston Super Clinic.

  Aboriginal adults can get the vaccine by contacting their local Aboriginal Health Clinic by phone or by walking in or at a participating GP clinic.

  NT Health is providing the vaccine to Aboriginal people in communities where it is the primary health care provider.

  Booking a COVID-19 vaccine
  https://coronavirus.nt.gov.au

- **Can I get the vaccine if I don't have a Medicare card?**

  If you don't have a Medicare Card, you can still get the COVID-19 vaccine. To do this you will need to get an Individual Health Identifier (IHI) through Services Australia.

  You can do this by:

  - Going into your nearest Centrelink office to apply for an IHI.
  - Downloading and completing the Request or Update an Individual Healthcare Identifier Form from the Services Australia website.
  - Submitting your IHI application with certified copies of your proof of identity via email, post or fax or by lodging it at your nearest Centrelink office.

  Apply for an Individual Health Identifier with *www.servicesaustralia.gov.au*

- **Is receiving a COVID-19 vaccine voluntary?**

  The COVID-19 vaccine is voluntary but strongly encouraged.

  It is possible, that in the future, vaccination against COVID-19 might become a requirement for travel to certain destinations or for people working in high risk workplaces. If this becomes the case, there will be exemptions in place for people who are unable to be vaccinated.

  The COVID-19 vaccine is free for all adults living in Australia including permanent residents and temporary visa holders.

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

  All people in the Northern Territory aged 12 years and over are eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine.

- **Who cannot get the COVID-19 vaccine?**

  If you have a severe allergy it is recommended you talk to your GP or medical practitioner before getting the COVID-19 vaccine.

  For more information visit Australian Government Department of Health website or call the National COVID-19 Helpline.

  Australian Government Department of Health
  www.health.gov.au

  National COVID-19 Helpline
  Phone: 1800 020 080

- **Can I get the COVID-19 vaccine if I am planning on getting pregnant, pregnant or breastfeeding?**

  You can get the COVID-19 vaccine if you are pregnant or breastfeeding. Ask your doctor or pharmacist for advice if you have any questions about getting the vaccine.

- **How is the vaccine being rolled out to Aboriginal communities?**

  This is the largest and most complex vaccine rollout ever seen in Australia.

  NT Health is working with the Australian Government and Aboriginal and community health partners, to deliver the COVID-19 vaccine to all Territorians including those living in remote communities.

  Aboriginal people can get their vaccine through local Aboriginal health clinics, NT Health clinics and GP clinics.

- **Can I bring someone to my vaccination appointment with me?**

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

- **Will I get a record of my vaccination?**

  Vaccination information is recorded on the Australian Immunisation Register.

  Australians can access their immunisation history statement through Medicare for proof of vaccination both digitally and in hard copy, if required.

Safety, testing and trials

- ### Are the COVID-19 vaccines safe?

  The Therapeutic Goods Administration is responsible for regulating vaccines in Australia and has strict requirements including a rigorous testing, assessment and approvals process.

  The AstraZeneca Vaccine and the Pfizer Vaccine have been approved for use in Australia.

- ### How is a vaccine approved for use in Australia?

  The COVID-19 vaccines being used in Australia have been approved by the Therapeutic Goods Administration and are administered under the advice of the COVID-19 Vaccine and Treatments for Australia – Science and Industry Technical Advisory Group and the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI).

  Before any vaccine is approved for use in Australia, including a COVID-19 vaccine, it must pass the Therapeutic Goods Administration's rigorous assessment and approval processes. This includes assessment of its safety, quality and effectiveness.

  Therapeutic Goods Administration
  www.tga.gov.au/covid-19-vaccines

- ### How were the COVID-19 vaccines developed and approved in a short timeframe?

  All available resources and efforts have been directed towards finding an effective vaccine, due to the urgency of protecting people from the COVID-19 virus.

  Some of the reasons behind this rapid progress include:

  - Unprecedented levels of funding and collaboration between vaccine developers and governments around the world. Planning has been undertaken early, such as investing in manufacturing facilities before a vaccine is even available.
  - Technology has evolved to make vaccine development faster than in the past. To develop a vaccine, scientists need to understand the virus's genetic code. New technology has allowed researchers to quickly identify the genetic code of the COVID-19 virus, soon after the virus emerged. This allowed scientists around the world to start work in designing and building vaccines.
  - 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.

- **What is this side effect that everyone is talking about associated with the AstraZeneca vaccine?**

  Advice from the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisations (ATAGI) recommends the AstraZeneca vaccine to people aged 60 years and over, while the Pfizer vaccine is preferred for people aged 12-59 years.

  This recommendation is based on the increasing risk of severe outcomes in older adults who get the COVID-19 virus, hence the benefits from the vaccination outweigh the risks for individuals 60 years and over. For those under 60, there is a potentially increased risk of thrombosis with thrombocytopenia following AstraZeneca vaccine.

  The COVID-19 pandemic is continuing to cause severe disease around the world, with many lives being lost.

  - In the UK one in every 34 people who got COVID-19 died
  - In Australia one in 32 people who got COVID-19 died

  The Australian population remains vulnerable to COVID-19 and most Australians have not yet been vaccinated and are not immune.

- **I've had my first dose of the AstraZeneca vaccine, what should I do?**

  If you have had your first dose of the AstraZeneca vaccine without any serious side effects, you should receive your second dose of AstraZeneca as planned. This includes adults 50 to 59 years of age. It is recommended the second dose is given between four to 12 weeks after the first dose. You need two doses of the same vaccine to ensure the best protection.

- **Do the vaccines contain any animal products?**

  The approved COVID-19 vaccines do not contain any animal or egg products.

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

  No, the vaccines available do not use the live or whole virus that causes COVID-19 and will not give you COVID-19.

- **Do I still need to practice hand hygiene and physical distancing even if I've been vaccinated?**

  Personal behaviour remains our best defence against COVID-19 until everyone is vaccinated. Keep practicing good hygiene, apply physical distancing, stay at home when sick and get tested when displaying any symptoms.

- **How long does the vaccine protect me from getting COVID-19?**

  The Pfizer and AstraZeneca vaccines protect against COVID-19 symptoms and severe disease after a person receives two doses.

  At this stage, there is not enough information to understand the long term protection against COVID-19 after vaccination. Booster doses may be required, similar to other vaccinations, such as the flu vaccine.

  The Therapeutic Goods Administration will continue to monitor the ongoing research to understand how the vaccines work over time. This is why it's important that even if you have been vaccinated, you should continue practising good hygiene, physical distancing, and staying home if you are unwell.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Northern Territory Government – Coronavirus
www.coronavirus.nt.gov.au

Australian Government Department of Health
www.health.gov.au

National COVID-19 Helpline
Phone: 1800 020 080

Tina Murphy, Thomas Mayor and Carol Stanislaus after their COVID-19 vaccination

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