Government of South Australia
SA Health

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Frequently asked questions

ABOUT THE VACCINE

HOW DO THE COVID-19 VACCINES WORK?

COVID-19 vaccines prepare your body to defend itself against COVID-19 and train your immune system to recognise COVID-19. They have been designed to help you fight off COVID-19 before it makes you sick and to reduce the severity of your symptoms if you do get sick. Most vaccines work in this way and the goal is to prevent serious illness and death.

When a person is given the Pfizer or Moderna COVID-19 vaccine, some of their cells will read the vaccine's mRNA instructions and temporarily produce the spike protein, which mimics the COVID-19 virus. The person's immune system recognises this protein as foreign and produces antibodies and activates T cells (white blood cells) to attack it.

When a person is given the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine, some of their cells will be "infected" by a dead adenovirus (common cold) carrying the spike protein DNA, which mimics the COVID-19 virus. The immune system recognises this protein as foreign and produces antibodies and activates T cells (white blood cells) to attack it.

WILL THE VACCINES REDUCE THE SPREAD OF TRANSMISSION OF THE VIRUS?

During clinical trials of the COVID-19 vaccines, research focused on whether the vaccines helped produce enough antibodies to stop us from getting sick. The ones that did this safely and effectively have been approved for use.

Now that the vaccines are being rolled out worldwide, early research suggests they may also reduce how infectious we are if we do catch COVID-19, which could help stop or reduce the spread of the virus.

It is very important that we continue practising good hygiene and physical distancing, using the COVID SAfe Check-In, and getting tested and staying home if unwell.

WHAT'S IN THE COVID-19 VACCINES?

Vaccine ingredients vary depending on the use of the vaccine. Generally, vaccines may contain some of the following ingredients:

- a protein component of a virus
- a piece of genetic code (DNA or mRNA)
- a very small dose of a weakened virus
- a substance to boost the immune response (an adjuvant)
- a small amount of preservative
- sterile salt water (saline) for injections

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

DO THE VACCINES CONTAIN ANY ANIMAL PRODUCTS?

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

DO THE COVID-19 VACCINES WORK ON NEW VARIANTS?

It is anticipated that the COVID-19 vaccines will be effective against newer strains of COVID-19.

Evidence suggests the COVID-19 vaccines remain effective in preventing symptomatic infection and severe disease caused by the Delta variant of COVID-19. The vaccines are more than 90% effective in preventing hospitalisation from the Delta strain. Two doses of either the COVID-19 vaccines are considered better against the Delta variant than one. However, one dose still provides partial protection against infection and severe disease.

ARE COVID-19 VACCINES FREE?

Yes. COVID-19 vaccines are free for all people living in Australia. If you are not eligible for Medicare, you can still get the COVID-19 vaccine for free at SA Health COVID-19 Vaccination Clinics and Respiratory Clinics.

WHY DOES EVERYONE NEED TO GET VACCINATED?

COVID-19 vaccinations reduce the community's risk of COVID-19 outbreaks and will help to reduce symptoms and side-effects of COVID-19 if you are exposed.

There's growing evidence that vaccinated people are less infectious if they do catch COVID-19, which means getting vaccinated is the best way you can protect yourself and your loved ones.

ELIGIBILITY

WHO CAN GET THE COVID-19 VACCINE?

The COVID-19 vaccine is available to anyone aged 5 and over. You can find a clinic near you by visiting our vaccination clinics and sites page.

I'M FIT AND HEALTHY – DO I STILL NEED TO GET VACCINATED?

COVID-19 can cause very serious disease, long term health issues, and death. COVID-19 can be a serious illness for anyone who gets it, including people who are young, fit and otherwise healthy.

There's growing evidence that vaccinated people are less infectious if they do catch COVID-19, which means getting vaccinated is the best way you can protect yourself and your loved ones.

CAN I STILL GET A COVID-19 VACCINE IF I DON'T HAVE A MEDICARE CARD?

If you are not eligible for Medicare, you can get the COVID-19 vaccine for free at an SA Health COVID-19 Vaccination Clinic or a Respiratory Clinic.

CAN I HAVE THE VACCINE IF I AM IMMUNOCOMPROMISED?

Immunocompromised people are being prioritised to receive a COVID-19 vaccine, as they are at increased risk of severe outcomes with COVID-19.

None of the COVID-19 vaccines that have been approved, or are currently being considered for approval, in Australia contain the live COVID-19 virus, which means they are safe for immunocompromised people.

If you are immunocompromised, you should follow the advice of your doctor, including considering when to get the vaccine amongst any other treatments or medications.

IS IT SAFE TO RECEIVE THE COVID-19 VACCINE IF I'M UNDERGOING CANCER TREATMENT?

Everyone currently receiving chemotherapy, immunotherapy, CAR-T-cell therapies, hormonal therapies or stem cell transplants can still receive the vaccine. However, talk to your treating doctor about timing your vaccine with your other treatments.

People with active cancer or who are undergoing cancer treatments are at higher risk of severe COVID-19 infection and death compared to the general population. People with active blood cancers are at especially high risk.

Read more information on getting vaccinated against COVID-19 while you have cancer.

CAN MY CHILD AGED 12 OR OVER BE VACCINATED?

The Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine is available for people aged 12 and over at SA Health vaccination clinics, and selected GPs, pharmacies and Respiratory Clinics. Some schools are providing the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine to their students.

The Moderna COVID-19 vaccine is available for people aged 12 and over at selected pharmacies.

For more information and access to FAQs for youth and parents or caregivers, visit the COVID-19 vaccination for youth page.

CAN MY CHILD AGED 5 TO 11 BE VACCINATED?

The Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine is available for children aged 5 to 11 at most SA Health vaccination clinics (not including mobile clinics), and selected GPs, Respiratory Clinics and pharmacies. Bookings are available on our vaccination clinics and sites page.

Children aged 5 to 11 will receive two doses, 8 weeks apart. The dose is one third of the amount compared to the vaccine for people aged 12 and over.

For more information, visit the COVID-19 vaccination for children aged 5 to 11 page.

MY CHILD IS 5 TO 15 AND HAS AN UNDERLYING MEDICAL CONDITION OR DISABILITY, CAN THEY BE VACCINATED?

If your child is aged 5 to 15 and has an underlying medical condition or disability, you should discuss their vaccination with their treating doctor or specialist. Your doctor or specialist may decide your child requires further review or they may need an appointment at the Paediatric COVID-19 Specialist Immunisation Service at the Women's and Children's Hospital.

If this is the case, your doctor will need to complete a referral form and you will be contacted directly by the Women's and Children's vaccination clinic for an appointment.

Speak to your child's treating doctor or specialist if they are on National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and/or living with disability requiring frequent assistance with activities of daily living, including down syndrome, muscular dystrophy, traumatic brain and spinal cord injury, or severe intellectual disability.

A comprehensive list of eligible conditions is available online.

CAN I GET THE COVID-19 VACCINE IF I AM PLANNING A PREGNANCY, CURRENTLY PREGNANT OR BREASTFEEDING?

The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RANZCOG) and Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) recommend pregnant women are offered mRNA COVID-19 vaccines, such as Pfizer and Moderna, at any stage of pregnancy. This is due to the risk increased risk of severe outcomes from COVID-19 to those who are pregnant and their baby.

Global surveillance data from large numbers of pregnant women have not identified any significant safety concerns with mRNA COVID-19 vaccines given at any stage of pregnancy. There is also evidence of antibodies in cord blood and breast milk, which may offer protection to infants through passive immunity.

If you are pregnant, you should discuss vaccination with your health professional.

If you are planning a pregnancy, you can safely receive an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine, such as Pfizer or Moderna. You do not need to avoid becoming pregnant before or after vaccination. You are not required to have a pregnancy test before getting vaccinated.

If you are breastfeeding, you can receive an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine at any time. You do not need to stop breastfeeding before or after vaccination.

All people aged 18 and over who have had their second dose of a COVID-19 vaccine at least three months ago, including those who are pregnant, are eligible for a Pfizer or Moderna COVID-19 booster dose.

For more information, visit the COVID-19 vaccination and pregnancy, planning a family, and breastfeeding page and read the Australian Government's COVID-19 vaccination decision guide for women who are pregnant, breastfeeding, or planning pregnancy.

VACCINATION APPOINTMENT

DO I GET TO CHOOSE WHAT TYPE OF VACCINE I HAVE?

The paediatric Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine is available for people aged 5 to 11.

The Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine is available for people aged 12 and over.

The Moderna COVID-19 vaccine is available for people aged 12 and over at selected pharmacies and for people aged 18 and over at SA Health booster vaccination clinics.

The AstraZeneca vaccine is available for people aged 18 and over at selected GPs and pharmacies.

SHOULD I AVOID BEING VACCINATED IF I FEEL UNWELL?

If you are unwell with symptoms of COVID-19, including fever or chills, cough, sore throat, runny nose, shortness of breath, loss of taste or smell, or diarrhoea and vomiting, you should get tested for COVID-19 and isolate until you receive your results.

If you have received a negative COVID-19 test result and only have a mild fever, you can still be vaccinated. If you have a high fever, you should delay your vaccination until you are well.

If you've tested positive to COVID-19, or are a close contact of someone with COVID-19, remain in quarantine and do not attend your vaccine appointment.

WHO WILL ADMINISTER MY VACCINE?

You could get your COVID-19 vaccine from a doctor, nurse, pharmacist or other healthcare worker.

The person vaccinating you has completed COVID-19 vaccination training to ensure they can safely manage and administer COVID-19 vaccines.

The training is available for:

- health professionals in hospitals
- general practices
- State and Commonwealth vaccination clinics
- Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations
- pharmacies

WHAT DO I NEED FOR MY COVID-19 VACCINATION APPOINTMENT?

If you have a Medicare card, you will need to bring your card to your appointment. If you do not have a Medicare card, bring a form of photo ID.

It's important to make sure your details are up to date with Medicare. You can do this through your online account on MyGov, on the Express Medicare Plus App, or you can call Medicare on 132 011.

You may also need to bring proof of eligibility (e.g. work ID or a letter from your employer).

CAN I BRING SOMEONE TO MY VACCINATION APPOINTMENT WITH ME?

Children aged under 16 need to be accompanied by a parent or caregiver.

People aged 16 and over can also have someone attend their vaccination appointment for support. This can be a support worker, family member, carer or friend.

CAN I WITHDRAW CONSENT ON THE DAY OF THE VACCINE?

Yes, receiving the COVID-19 vaccine is voluntary and consent can be withdrawn at any time prior to 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're not eligible for Medicare, you can request an Individual Healthcare Identifier (IHI) to get an immunisation summary through myGov.

For more information, visit www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/covidvaccineproof.

WHAT ARE THE SIDE EFFECTS OF COVID-19 VACCINES?

Vaccines, like any other medication or natural therapy, can cause reactions or side effects. The extent and severity of side effects from the COVID-19 vaccines are similar to those from other vaccines. As part of regulatory assessment of all vaccines, the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) considers possible side effects. The benefits must outweigh the risks for a vaccine to be registered for use in Australia.

You may experience minor reactions or side effects following vaccination. Most reactions or side effects last no more than a couple of days and do not require special treatment. Serious reactions like allergic reactions are extremely rare.

Common reactions to the COVID-19 vaccines include:

- tenderness, pain and swelling at the injection site
- tiredness
- headache
- muscle and joint pain
- chills
- fever

Some people may also experience redness or itching at the injection site, nausea, pain in the limb, enlarged lymph nodes, difficulty sleeping or generally feeling unwell.

Reactions or side effects, such as fever and tiredness, from vaccines are often a sign that your immune system has been activated and is learning how to fight the disease you've been vaccinated against. You can use the COVID-19 Vaccine Side Effect Checker if you have concerns after having either of the COVID-19 vaccines.

An extremely rare blood clotting syndrome, Thrombosis with Thrombocytopenia Syndrome (TTS), has been linked to the AstraZeneca vaccine.

Very rare and generally mild cases of myocarditis and pericarditis have been observed following vaccination with the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine. See the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) statement.

Myocarditis is inflammation of the heart muscle while pericarditis is inflammation of the lining around the heart. There are many potential causes of myocarditis and pericarditis, including as a complication in people who are infected with COVID-19 or some other viruses.

The benefits of protection against COVID-19 far outweigh the risks from rare and generally mild side effects. Effects on the heart from COVID-19 infection are much more common and usually more severe than with rare effects from vaccination. The Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) reaffirms that the benefits of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine outweigh these rare risks.

As with all COVID-19 vaccines, the TGA will continue to monitor the safety of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine and update recommendations as needed.

If you have any concerns, speak with your GP.

WHAT IF I FEEL UNWELL AFTER MY VACCINE?

As with any medication, very rarely a severe allergic reaction may occur. If it does, it will generally occur within 15 minutes of the vaccination.

The Australian Immunisation Handbook, developed by the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI), provides clinical guidelines for healthcare professionals about using vaccines safely and effectively.

It recommends that:

- all vaccine recipients be observed for at least 15 minutes after they have been vaccinated to ensure they do not experience an immediate adverse event and to provide rapid medical care if needed.
- people with a history of anaphylaxis to non-vaccine antigens (e.g. food, insect stings, medicines) should be observed for 30 minutes following administration of a COVID-19 vaccine dose.

You can use the COVID-19 Vaccine Side Effect Checker if you have concerns about any symptoms after having either of the COVID-19 vaccines. The COVID-19 vaccine side effects symptom checker is not a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always consult a medical professional for serious symptoms or emergencies.

See your doctor or healthcare professional as soon as possible or go directly to a hospital if:

- you have a reaction that you consider severe or unexpected
- you are concerned about your condition after vaccination.
- you experience any side effects associated with TTS.

Seek medical attention immediately if you experience any of the following symptoms:

- shortness of breath
- chest pain
- swelling in your leg
- persistent abdominal (belly) pain
- neurological symptoms, including severe and persistent headaches or blurred vision
- tiny blood spots under the skin beyond the site of injection.

Reporting reactions and side effects is an essential part of ongoing vaccine safety monitoring. If you experience side effects from the vaccine, you can let your vaccine provider know and they can report them on your behalf.

If you have any general questions or concerns, you can also call the SA COVID-19 Information Line on 1800 253 787 from 9am to 5pm, 7 days a week.

SECOND, THIRD AND BOOSTER DOSES

WHAT IS THE TIMING BETWEEN THE FIRST AND SECOND DOSE?

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 the following interval between COVID-19 vaccine doses:

- AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine – 8 to 12 weeks (4 weeks at a minimum)*
- Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine – 21 days**
- Moderna COVID-19 vaccine – 28 days

If the time between doses exceeds the above recommendations, the second dose should be administered as soon as possible.

*The AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine is most effective when there is an 8 to 12 week interval between doses.

**The second dose of Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine should not be administered earlier than 21 days and should be given within 42 days. The vaccine can be given safely after 42 days, however the long term immunity provided may be less.

Discuss the timing between your COVID-19 vaccines with your GP if you are concerned.

CAN I GET A DIFFERENT VACCINE FOR THE SECOND DOSE?

The Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) recommends that the same COVID-19 vaccine should be used for the first two doses.

However, as the supply of vaccines increases, ATAGI advises that an alternative vaccine can be given if first dose recipients are unable to receive a second dose of the same brand or do not want to have a second dose of the same brand.

If you've had your first dose of the AstraZeneca vaccine without developing Thrombosis with Thrombocytopenia Syndrome (TTS) or experiencing another serious adverse event, then you can safely receive your second dose 8 to 12 weeks after your first dose.

If you do not wish to have another dose of AstraZeneca, you may have a Pfizer or Moderna vaccine at least 4 to 12 weeks after your first dose of AstraZeneca, or at any time after that interval to ensure you are fully vaccinated.

I AM IMMUNOCOMPROMISED, CAN I GET A THIRD DOSE OF THE COVID-19 VACCINE?

The Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) recommend that people who are severely immunocompromised aged 12 and over have a third dose of a COVID-19 vaccine. This is to increase the level of immunity for severely immunocompromised people to as close as possible to the general population.

GPs are able to vaccinate eligible patients with a third dose of a COVID-19 vaccine. If eligible patients cannot access this at their GP, they can attend a SA Health vaccination clinic site or pharmacy with evidence of eligibility. This can include:

- A referral letter from GP or other treating clinician
- Proof of an alternative medical record that is dated within the last 5 years:
    - a printout of the medical history (from clinical records or MyHealth Record)
    - a printout of a chronic disease care plan from treating GP
    - a discharge summary from a hospital or other medical facility
    - a named script for a medication that has been prescribed to treat one or more of the relevant conditions or procedures outlined in the guideline.
- A condition-specific identifier
- A completed Eligibility Declaration Form (if unable provide any of 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.

WHO IS ELIGIBLE FOR A COVID-19 VACCINE BOOSTER?

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

All people aged 18 and over who have had their second dose of a COVID-19 vaccine at least three months ago are eligible for a Pfizer or Moderna COVID-19 booster dose.

You can receive your Pfizer booster dose at SA Health vaccination clinics (including mobile clinics), and participating pharmacies, GPs and Respiratory Clinics. You can receive your Moderna booster dose from participating pharmacies and SA Health booster vaccination clinics. Find a clinic by visiting our vaccination clinics and sites page.

CAN I GET A COVID-19 VACCINE BOOSTER DOSE WHILE PREGNANT?

Yes. All people aged 18 and over who have had their second dose of a COVID-19 vaccine at least three months ago, including those who are pregnant, are eligible for a Pfizer or Moderna COVID-19 booster dose.

WHAT IS THE TIMING BETWEEN THE SECOND DOSE AND BOOSTER DOSE?

The booster dose should be given at least three months after your second dose of a COVID-19 vaccine.

CAN I GET A DIFFERENT VACCINE FOR MY BOOSTER DOSE?

Currently, the Pfizer and Moderna COVID-19 vaccine are approved for a booster dose.

DO I HAVE TO GET MY SECOND OR BOOSTER DOSE AT THE SAME PLACE I GOT MY OTHER DOSES?

You can get your COVID-19 vaccine at any of the locations on our vaccination clinics and sites page.

I HAD MY FIRST OR SECOND DOSE INTERSTATE OR OVERSEAS, HOW DO I MAKE AN APPOINTMENT FOR MY SECOND OR BOOSTER DOSE?

If you received one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine while interstate or overseas, you can book your second appointment using the vaccination clinics and sites page.

If you received a dose of a COVID-19 vaccine not approved for use in Australia, you should discuss this with your GP, as you may benefit from a further vaccination.

If you need to get your booster, you can book your appointment using the vaccination clinics and sites page.

I HAVE HAD COVID-19, CAN I GET MY SECOND DOSE OR BOOSTER DOSE?

People who have had COVID-19 can be vaccinated with a COVID-19 vaccine. Vaccination can be deferred for up to 6 months as past infection reduces the chance of reinfection for at least this amount of time. However, there is no requirement to delay vaccination.

If you test positive for COVID-19 between your first and second dose, or between your second and booster dose, you should delay your next dose until you have recovered.

AFTER RECEIVING THE COVID-19 VACCINE

HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE FOR THE COVID-19 VACCINE TO PROTECT ME?

The COVID-19 vaccines require the full two dose course for the best immune response. Whilst you may be partially protected against COVID-19 as soon as 12 days after the first dose, this protection is likely to be short lived.

The second dose encourages the body to create stronger protection against the virus that causes COVID-19. Individuals may not be fully protected until 7 to 14 days after their second dose of the COVID-19 vaccines.

HOW LONG WILL THE COVID-19 VACCINE PROTECT ME FOR?

Clinical trials have shown the COVID-19 vaccines protect against COVID-19 symptoms and severe disease after a person receives two doses. Booster doses are required similar to other vaccinations, such as the flu vaccine.

The Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) is monitoring the ongoing research to understand how the vaccines work over time.

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

CAN I CATCH COVID-19 EVEN IF I'VE HAD THE VACCINE?

It is still possible to catch COVID-19 even if you have been vaccinated. The COVID-19 vaccines train your immune system to recognise COVID-19 and have been designed to help you fight off COVID-19 before it makes you sick, and reduce the severity of your symptoms if you do get sick.

Most vaccines work in this way and the goal is to prevent serious illness and death. This is why it's important that everyone gets vaccinated.

IF I CATCH COVID-19 AFTER I HAVE THE VACCINE, CAN I PASS THE INFECTION ONTO OTHERS?

It is still possible to pass on COVID-19 to other people even if you have been vaccinated, however, research is indicating that the vaccines may reduce how infectious a person is, which in turn may reduce the chance of them spreading the virus on to other people.

The Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) is monitoring the ongoing research to understand whether the vaccines can stop a person passing the virus onto others.

This is why it's important that even if you have been vaccinated, you should continue practising good hygiene and physical distancing, using the COVID SAfe Check-In, and getting tested and staying home if you are unwell.

I FEEL UNWELL AFTER RECEIVING THE VACCINE, SHOULD I GET TESTED FOR COVID-19?

The vaccines are designed to prevent serious illness and death. You cannot catch COVID-19 from the COVID-19 vaccine, but you can still catch COVID-19 after being vaccinated.

For the next day or two following your vaccination, you may feel a little bit feverish, tired, or achy as side effects of the vaccine. If this happens, you do not need to get a COVID-19 test.

If you have these symptoms, and you also have COVID-19 symptoms such as fever or chills, cough, sore throat, runny nose, shortness of breath, loss of taste or smell, or diarrhoea and vomiting, you should get tested for COVID-19 immediately.

I'M FULLY VACCINATED, DO I STILL NEED TO HAVE A COVID-19 TEST IF I HAVE COVID-19 SYMPTOMS?

You should still have a COVID-19 test if you develop symptoms of COVID-19, no matter how mild. It is still possible to catch COVID-19 even if you have been fully vaccinated, and you could pass the virus on to other people who may not be vaccinated. It's important to get tested for COVID-19 if you are unwell to help us detect any COVID-19 in our community before it can spread to others.

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

DO I STILL NEED TO QUARANTINE IF I'VE BEEN FULLY VACCINATED?

You still need to comply with the restrictions in South Australia, including quarantine and testing requirements, even if you've been fully vaccinated against COVID-19. This includes arrivals from overseas.

It is still possible to catch COVID-19 even if you have been fully vaccinated and you could pass the virus on to others who may not be vaccinated.

ASTRAZENECA COVID-19 VACCINE

WHAT IS THROMBOSIS WITH THROMBOCYTOPENIA (TTS)?

Thrombosis with Thrombocytopenia Syndrome (TTS) is a rare side effect of the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine. The condition is extremely rare, can be very serious and can cause long term disability or death.

- **Thrombosis** is the formation of a blood clot, which prevents blood flowing normally through the body.
- **Thrombocytopenia** is a condition in which you have a low blood platelet (thrombocytes) count. Platelets are blood cells that help blood clot and stop bleeding by clumping and forming plugs in blood vessel injuries.
- **Thrombosis with Thrombocytopenia Syndrome (TTS)** is a rare and new syndrome which involves blood clots (occurring in body sites like the brain or abdomen) together with low platelet levels.

TTS typically occurs around 4 to 30 days after vaccination with AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine.

If you experience the following symptoms after your vaccination you should seek medical attention immediately:

- A severe persistent headache with additional features:
  - appears at least 4 days after vaccination
  - does not improve with simple painkillers
  - may be worse when lying down
  - may be accompanied by nausea and vomiting
- Neurological symptoms such as:
  - blurred vision
  - difficulty with speech
  - drowsiness
  - seizures
- Shortness of breath
- Chest pain
- Swelling in your leg
- Persistent abdominal (belly) pain
- Tiny blood spots under the skin away from the site of injection.

AM I AT A HIGHER RISK OF DEVELOPING TTS IF I'M ALREADY SUSCEPTIBLE TO BLOOD CLOTS?

So far no specific biological risk factors or pre-existing medical conditions have been found to increase or decrease the risk of Thrombosis with Thrombocytopenia Syndrome (TTS). However, if you have any concerns, you should discuss them with your doctor.

ATAGI recommends that vaccination with any COVID-19 vaccine should be deferred for people who have a confirmed medical history of:

- cerebral venous sinus thrombosis (CVST)
- heparin induced thrombocytopenia (HIT)
- idiopathic splanchnic (mesenteric, portal and splenic) venous thrombosis
- anti-phospholipid syndrome with thrombosis.

HOW CAN I GET THE COVID-19 ASTRAZENECA VACCINE IF I AM 18 TO 59 YEARS OLD?

The Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) recommends the Pfizer or Moderna COVID-19 vaccine as the preferred vaccine for people aged 12 to 59 years, but the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine can be provided to people aged 18 to 59 years of age following an appropriate risk/benefit assessment and informed consent process with their vaccine provider.

To get vaccinated with the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine, you will need to make an informed decision by speaking with your vaccine provider. Some conditions may mean it is not suitable for you and it is important that you discuss this with your healthcare provider.

WHERE CAN I GET THE COVID-19 ASTRAZENECA VACCINE?

The AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine is available at selected GPs and pharmacies. You can book an appointment by visiting our vaccination clinics and sites page.

SAFETY, TESTING AND TRIALS

HOW ARE VACCINES APPROVED FOR USE IN AUSTRALIA?

Before any vaccine is registered for use, it is tested extensively during development and then in thousands of people. Testing begins with laboratory research, then animal studies and finally human clinical trials using volunteers.

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

The COVID-19 vaccines being used in Australia have been approved by the TGA and 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).

The TGA is actively monitoring COVID-19 vaccine development in Australia and around the world, and is part of a network of international regulators that meet regularly to discuss the development of COVID-19 vaccines.

ARE THE COVID-19 VACCINES SAFE?

All vaccines, including the COVID-19 vaccines, are thoroughly tested for safety before they are approved for use in Australia. The Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) approves all COVID-19 vaccines being used in Australia to ensure extremely high safety standards are met. This includes careful analysis of clinical trial data, ingredients, chemistry, manufacturing and other factors.

With billions of people vaccinated globally with these vaccines, real-world data is showing high effectiveness for both vaccines.

Real-world data has also uncovered an extremely rare blood clotting syndrome that is a rare side effect of the AstraZeneca vaccine. The TGA and the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) responded quickly, updating their advice to provide new guidelines for the use of AstraZeneca in Australia.

We can be confident that both vaccines are safe and provide protection against serious illness and death from COVID-19.

WHAT CHECKS ARE IN PLACE TO ENSURE PEOPLE RECEIVE THE CORRECT DOSAGE OF THE VACCINE?

The person vaccinating you has completed COVID-19 vaccination training. In South Australia, two trained staff members check the dosage prior to vaccination as an additional safety measure.

The Australian Government partnered with the Australian College of Nursing to develop and deliver accredited training modules to ensure vaccinators can safely manage and administer COVID-19 vaccines.

ARE THE VACCINES BEING MONITORED IN AUSTRALIA?

The Therapeutic Goods Association (TGA) tests every batch of COVID-19 vaccines to check how potent they are and ensure they have not been contaminated before they are dispatched for delivery.

You may also receive a text message after your vaccination. This will ask if you have had any side effects and the information contributes to AusVaxSafety's national COVID-19 vaccine safety surveillance.

AusVaxSafety is a world-leading national vaccine safety system, led by the National Centre for Immunisation Research and Surveillance.

The TGA and the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) are monitoring the safety of the vaccines in Australia and overseas.

HOW WERE THE VACCINES DEVELOPED AND APPROVED IN A SHORT TIMEFRAME?

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

Some of the reasons behind this rapid progress include:

- Unprecedented levels of funding and collaboration between vaccine developers and governments around the world. Planning was undertaken early, including investing in manufacturing facilities before the vaccines were 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 allowed researchers to quickly identify the genetic code of the COVID-19 virus soon after it emerged and scientists around the world could start work designing and building vaccines quickly.
- Clinical trials progress more quickly if a disease is widespread, which was the case for COVID-19. Researchers could evaluate the effect of a vaccine between the unvaccinated and vaccinated groups much sooner than for a rare disease.

WHAT WAS INVOLVED IN COVID-19 VACCINE TRIALS?

Before any vaccine is registered for use, it is tested extensively during development and then in thousands of people. Testing begins with laboratory research, then animal studies and finally human clinical trials using volunteers.

Clinical trials must provide scientific evidence which demonstrates that the benefits of a vaccine greatly outweigh any risks. There are different phases of clinical trials:

- **Phase 1** clinical trials usually include a few dozen healthy adult volunteers. They focus primarily on establishing that the vaccine is safe and on demonstrating that the vaccine induces an immune response.
- **Phase 2** clinical trials have hundreds of volunteers and can include specific groups the vaccine is intended for. These trials aim to test whether the vaccine causes an immune response and confirm that it is safe with minor side effects.
- **Phase 3** clinical trials include many thousands of participants. They aim to test whether a vaccine is effective in preventing people from getting the disease, such as COVID-19. These trials also thoroughly assess the vaccine for safety and side effects. Researchers usually compare data between vaccinated people and those who received a placebo to compare the frequency of infection, disease severity and any reported side effects between the two groups.

For the COVID-19 vaccines, some of these phases have been combined. For example, in Phase 1 and 2 trials, results are analysed after the first few dozen volunteers are studied. The trial then proceeds in hundreds more people. Some Phase 3 studies start once preliminary data from Phase 1and 2 trials are available. Having these 'overlapping' timeframes helped develop the COVID-19 vaccines quickly, to make them available earlier.

OTHER QUESTIONS

WHAT IS THE NOVAVAX COVID-19 VACCINE?

The Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) has granted provisional approval for the Novavax COVID-19 vaccine in Australia.

The protein-based vaccine has been approved for 18 years and older as primary two dose course, with a three-week interval between doses. The Novavax COVID-19 vaccine is provisionally approved for primary vaccination only. It has not been approved for booster doses or for children.

It is expected that supplies will be available from February onwards pending final approval from the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI).

HOW LONG DO I HAVE TO WAIT BETWEEN RECEIVING THE COVID-19 VACCINE AND ANOTHER TYPE OF VACCINE?

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

The recommended minimum interval between other vaccines and a dose of COVID-19 vaccine is 7 days either side. This can be shortened (including same day administration) in special circumstances.

Speak to your GP or vaccine provider for more information.

CAN I LEAVE QUARANTINE TO GET MY FIRST DOSE OF COVID-19 VACCINATION?

You cannot leave quarantine to get a first dose of the COVID-19 vaccination. You should reschedule your appointment.

CAN I LEAVE QUARANTINE TO GET MY SECOND DOSE OF THE COVID-19 VACCINE?

If you are due to get your second dose of the Pfizer vaccine, you have up to 42 days from your first dose to get your second dose, and should reschedule your appointment within this timeframe if possible.

If you are due to get your second dose of the Moderna vaccine, you have up to 6 weeks from your first dose to get your second dose, and should reschedule your appointment within this timeframe if possible.

If you are due to get your second dose of the AstraZeneca vaccine, you have up to 12 weeks from your first dose to get your second dose, and should reschedule your appointment within this timeframe if possible.

CAN I LEAVE QUARANTINE TO GET MY BOOSTER DOSE OF THE COVID-19 VACCINE?

You can get your booster dose at any time three months after getting your second dose. You should reschedule your appointment once you have finished your quarantine period.

DO I NEED TO GET VACCINATED IF I HAVE ALREADY HAD COVID-19?

You should be vaccinated regardless of whether you already had COVID-19 infection, as reinfection is possible.

Vaccination can be deferred for up to 6 months as past infection reduces the chance of reinfection for at least this amount of time. However, there is no requirement to delay vaccination.

If you test positive for COVID-19 between your first and second dose, or between your second and booster dose, you should delay your next dose until you have recovered.

CAN THE VACCINES GIVE ME COVID-19?

No, COVID-19 vaccines do not use the live or whole virus that causes COVID-19.

DO COVID-19 VACCINES CAUSE INFERTILITY?

There is no evidence that COVID-19 vaccines have any impact on fertility.

The Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) will not approve a vaccine for use in Australia unless it is safe and effective, including impacts on fertility. There is no evidence that antibodies formed from COVID-19 vaccination cause any problems with pregnancy, including the development of the placenta.

Getting vaccinated before conceiving will give you some protection against COVID-19 throughout your pregnancy, depending on when you were vaccinated.

For more information, read the Australian Government's COVID-19 vaccination decision guide for women who are pregnant, breastfeeding, or planning pregnancy.

WILL THE VACCINES BE HARMFUL TO UNBORN CHILDREN?

It is not expected that the vaccine can cause any serious problems in pregnant women or their babies.

Other vaccines given during pregnancy, such as the influenza vaccine or whooping cough vaccine, do not cause unexpected side effects in pregnant women or their babies. They protect newborn babies from these diseases.

The COVID-19 vaccines have not yet been studied in pregnant women, though real-world data is starting to become available for babies who have been born after their mothers had the COVID-19 vaccine. Multiple babies have been born with COVID-19 antibodies because their mothers were vaccinated.

For more information, read the Australian Government's COVID-19 vaccination decision guide for women who are pregnant, breastfeeding, or planning pregnancy.

MORE INFORMATION

For more information about the COVID-19 vaccines, visit the Australian Government Department of Health website, which also has a range of translated information.

To get the facts about the COVID-19 vaccines and to book an appointment, visit covidvaccine.sa.gov.au.

For more information

SA COVID-19 Information Line 1800 253 787
covidvaccine.sa.gov.au

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