

STAFF INFOSHEET

Novel Coronavirus

COVID-19 vaccination roll-out advice to TSS

The purpose of this advice is to provide information and guidance to apply to Tasmanian State Service (TSS) Agencies and authorities regarding the Australian Government's national roll-out of the COVID-19 vaccination program.

This employment advice applies to all TSS employees and officers employed in accordance with the *State Service Act 2000*. Where applicable, this advice also applies to volunteers and contractors.

National and Tasmanian roll-out strategy of COVID-19 vaccines

The Australian Government is committed to the safe and effective roll-out of COVID-19 vaccinations as detailed in *Australia's COVID-19 Vaccine National Roll-out Strategy* (the Roll-out Strategy) and *Australia's COVID-19 Vaccine and Treatment Strategy*.

The Roll-out Strategy explains the process by which COVID-19 vaccinations will be made available to different population groups, prioritised on risk of infection and individual or cohort health risk.

The Roll-out Strategy applies to the entire TSS. The Tasmanian Government began Phase 1A of the COVID-19 vaccination program on 23 February 2021.

Prioritisation

The Roll-out Strategy has been developed by the Department of Health and is based on medical advice that prioritises individuals in Tasmania who are vulnerable to the coronavirus, are at increased risk of exposure, or who are working in jobs critical for managing the pandemic response.

The Tasmanian Government has identified the following priority groups for Phase 1A:

- Border and quarantine facilities staff, including nurses, hotel security, cleaners, social workers and food and beverage handlers;
- Vaccinating teams – including nurses and support staff; staff at Testing Clinics, including healthcare workers collecting samples, traffic control at testing sites, security and on-site administration;
- Staff who work at public and private laboratories involved in the collection and processing of samples;
- Emergency Department staff at public and private hospitals, including rotating anaesthetists;
- Intensive Care Unit (ICU) staff at public and private hospitals, including rotating anaesthetists;
- Staff of hospital wards dealing with COVID-19 infected patients, including rotating anaesthetists; and
- Certain ambulance staff.

TSS employees, including volunteers and contractors, will receive access to the COVID-19 vaccination during the appropriate phase of the Roll-out Strategy.

Each phase prioritises population groups depending upon an individual's demographics or the characteristics of the work they perform. For example, elderly Australians, or those working in quarantine and border security, will be offered a vaccination ahead of younger Australians or those not in high exposure risk roles.

Further information on Phase 1B onwards can be found on the Australian Government Department of Health website at www.health.gov.au.

Specific work groups may need to be assessed further to determine prioritisation for a vaccine. Any requests in this regard should be sent to tveoc@health.tas.gov.au for consideration by the panel who will provide advice on the priority given to specific workers for the State. Details should be provided on why the work group is critical, consistent with the Commonwealth guidelines, which can be found on the Australian Government Department of Health website at www.health.gov.au.

Vaccination requirements and support for employees

The Australian Government is committed to providing all Australians with access to free, safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines.

Vaccinations are an important component of the Tasmanian Government's response to COVID-19 and complement existing prevention and control measures already included in agency COVID-19 safety plans. The physical distancing, personal hygiene, regular cleaning and maintenance measures are at the centre of these plans – the vaccine does not replace these other critical safety measures.

Each vaccine in Australia is required to go through a rigorous approval process with the Therapeutic Goods Authority (TGA). This approval process means that Australians can be assured of the safety and effectiveness of all TGA approved vaccines. TSS employees are strongly encouraged to participate in the vaccination program (subject to individual medical needs and any other risk factors).

Support to assist employees in receiving a COVID-19 vaccination, consistent with the Roll-out Strategy, will include:

- identification/certification that particular employees fit a priority group for vaccination because of their work;
- where a vaccination appointment is scheduled during work hours, employees will continue to be paid their normal working hours, including reasonable travel time; and
- reasonable travel expenses, where significant travel is required to access a vaccination site.

During Phase 1A of the roll-out, if an employee is scheduled to receive a vaccination outside of their work hours with the agreement of the employer, the employee is taken to be on duty for the time taken to travel to and from the vaccination site at the rate equivalent to what the employee would have been paid for the period had they been working (and reasonable travel expenses, if any).

It is expected that wherever possible, vaccinations will be scheduled during an employee's normal working hours and they will be released from duty to attend the appointment.

Any employees with caring responsibilities that require assistance are strongly encouraged to discuss any issues with their manager.

Wellbeing supports such as the Employee Assistance Program are always available should employees wish to discuss personal concerns.

Employees will be provided with information on a regular basis to ensure awareness of Public Health requirements and COVID-safe work practices regardless of whether employees in the workplace are vaccinated.

As there will be a whole of government approach to Tasmania's vaccination plan for the TSS, the State Service Management Office (SSMO) will continue to work with agencies to support them to meet their obligations under work health and safety legislation as they consult directly with employees and their representatives on matters of workplace health and safety.

While employees will be encouraged to monitor vaccination information on the Australian Government Department of Health website at www.health.gov.au, additional and targeted information will be provided by the Tasmanian Government Department of Health (DOH) with information available at www.coronavirus.tas.gov.au, and, as necessary, where it relates to this advice, the SSMO website at www.dpac.tas.gov.au.

COVID-19 vaccination and Work Health and Safety responsibilities

Under the [Work Health and Safety Act 2012](#), Heads of Agency and the Head of the State Service have a duty to ensure the health and safety of workers and others while at work, so far as it is reasonably practicable.

Specifically, in relation to COVID-19, Heads of Agency/ Head of the State Service have a duty to eliminate, or if not possible, minimise, so far as is reasonably practicable, the risk of exposure to COVID-19 in the workplace. Heads of Agency may not be able to completely eliminate the risk of employees being exposed to COVID-19 while carrying out some work, however vaccination is considered one way to minimise that exposure, together with a range of COVID-19 control measures.

A safe and effective vaccine is only one part of keeping the community safe and healthy. Heads of Agency are strongly encouraging all employees to get vaccinated, if they

can. At this stage it is too early to tell if the COVID-19 vaccines will stop a vaccinated person from being infected with the virus. This means a vaccinated person may unknowingly carry and spread the virus to others around them, including other employees in the workplace. For this reason and others, Agencies must continue to apply all other COVID-19 control measures such as physical distancing, good hygiene, regular cleaning and maintenance, and ensuring employees do not attend work if they are unwell even if the workforce is vaccinated.

Heads of Agency will take a risk-based approach to the management of the vaccination program as it rolls-out.

Heads of Agency should review their risk assessments and COVID-safety plans and:

- Undertake a further risk assessment for a particular workplace/site as vaccinations are being introduced.
- Re-assess the existing control measures and how they will help manage the risks of COVID-19, including the vaccines, taking into account Public Health information.
- Consult with employees and representatives about relevant control measures, including the COVID-19 vaccine.

In reviewing or undertaking the risk assessment a Head of Agency should consider:

- What is the nature of the work performed by an employee/s?
- Is the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) recommending COVID-19 vaccinations for employee(s) in the particular work role? (As at 25 February 2021 the AHPPC advice was that the vaccine should not be mandated).
- Has the employee or group of employees had the opportunity to be vaccinated (please refer to the Vaccination Roadmap for detail of the prioritised population)?
- What is the current level of community transmission?
- What is the current level of border controls?
- What are the current relevant Public Health Directives and/or Emergency Management Directions?
- Will employees be exposed to the risk of infection as part of their work (for example, hotel quarantine workers)?
- Do the employees work with people who would be vulnerable to severe disease if they contract COVID-19?
- What is the likelihood that COVID-19 could spread in the workplace? For example, some work tasks may require employees to work in close proximity to each other.

- Do employees interact with large numbers of other people in the course of their work that could contribute to a 'super-spreading' event if the employees contract COVID-19?
- What other control measures are available and in place in the workplace? Do those control measures already minimise the risk of infection, so far as is reasonably practicable?

At this stage of the vaccination roll-out there is no Tasmanian Government policy to require vaccination of State Service employees. Currently, Safe Work Australia are advising that a requirement to be vaccinated is unlikely to be considered 'reasonably practicable'. Further, it is unlikely to be a breach of work health and safety obligations simply because an employer does not require their employees to get vaccinated.

It is possible that in the future, a vaccination against COVID-19 might become a requirement for people working in certain high-risk workplaces. If this becomes the case, there may be a need for a direction to an employee/s having regard to the considerations above. There will be exemptions in place for people who are unable to be vaccinated. Before implementing any changes in this area, further advice must be sought from the Head of the State Service.

As the information and advice about the vaccine program and roll-out is new and evolving, this advice will be updated as new information and advice is provided.

More information

- Australian Government Department of Health website under the COVID-19 vaccines section at www.health.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/covid-19-vaccines
- Safe Work Australia website at www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au
- Tasmanian Government Coronavirus website at www.coronavirus.tas.gov.au

Further information on COVID-19 and Tasmanian State Service employment can be found at www.dpac.tas.gov.au.