

STAFF INFOSHEET

Novel Coronavirus COVID-19 vaccinations - national roll-out Tasmania FAQs

Australian Federal and State Governments are committed to providing all Australians with access to a free, safe and effective COVID-19 vaccine. All Tasmanian State Service employees are strongly encouraged to get a vaccine where possible, subject to any individual medical needs or other risk factors. Phase 1A of the roll-out for Tasmania commenced on 23 February 2021.

Who will receive a vaccine?

The COVID-19 vaccine will be available free to all State Service Employees. The Australian Government's phased roll-out of vaccines across Australia is based on the best medical advice. Priority groups are identified using public health, medical and epidemiological evidence on who would be most affected if they contracted COVID-19, and those most likely to be exposed.

For employees that fall into Phase 1B or subsequent phases – you do not need to do anything now. While vaccinating every person will take time, it is important to know that there will be enough vaccine doses available for everyone. Further details of the phased roll-out can be found on the Australian Government Department of Health website at www.health.gov.au.

Why should I get a vaccine?

Vaccination is the most effective way to protect against infectious diseases.

Vaccines strengthen your immune system by training it to recognise and fight against specific viruses.

When you get vaccinated, you are protecting yourself and helping to protect the whole community.

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.

Are the vaccines safe?

Any COVID-19 vaccine must pass the Therapeutic Goods Administration's (TGA) rigorous processes to make sure it's safe and effective before being used in Australia.

The TGA gave provisional approval for:

- The Pfizer/BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine for people aged 16 years and older.
- The AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine for people aged 18 years and older.

Every Australian will need to receive two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine, several weeks apart, to make sure they are best protected.

I'm pregnant, can I be vaccinated?

The Australian Government Department of Health website at www.health.gov.au has produced a decision aid on COVID-19 vaccination for women who are pregnant, breastfeeding or planning pregnancy. Employees in these categories are encouraged to discuss the vaccine directly with their health professional.

When will I get the vaccine?

In Tasmania, everyone will have the opportunity to get a COVID-19 vaccine this year. Vaccines will be given in phases, prioritising those at highest risk first.

The Tasmanian Government began the roll-out of Phase 1A of the COVID-19 vaccination program on 23 February 2021.

People who will get the vaccine in the first stage were identified using Public Health, medical and epidemiological evidence on who is at higher risk of getting COVID-19 or getting very sick from it.

Further information on the roll-out phases can be found on the Tasmanian Government Coronavirus website at www.coronavirus.tas.gov.au

Which employees are in a priority group to receive the vaccine?

The following priority groups have been identified 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 COVID-19 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;
- Hospital Ward staff for wards who are treating COVID-19 patients, including rotating anaesthetists; and
- Certain ambulance staff.

Why am I not in a priority group to receive the vaccine?

The Roll-out Strategy has been developed by the Commonwealth 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.

Tasmanian State Service employees 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.

Does my Head of Agency have a duty of care to provide a COVID safe workplace?

Heads of Agency have a duty to eliminate or, if that is not reasonably practicable, minimise the risk of exposure to COVID-19 in the workplace, under the [Work Health and Safety Act 2012](#). A Head 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 the risk, so far as reasonably practicable, in conjunction with other COVID-19 control measures such as physical distancing, good hygiene, regular cleaning and ensuring employees do not attend work if they are unwell, even if the workforce is vaccinated.

As an employee, do I have obligations under the Work Health and Safety Act?

Yes, as an employee, you must take reasonable care of yourself and not do anything that would affect the health and safety of others in the workplace.

Can my Agency require me to be vaccinated?

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

Am I at risk in the workplace if I work with people that have not received the vaccine?

A safe and effective vaccine is only one part of keeping employees safe and healthy in the workplace. Heads of Agency strongly encourage 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, meaning 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, your Head of Agency will 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.

Will I be supported by my Agency if I have the vaccine?

Yes, all employees will be supported with paid time to attend their appointment if it is scheduled during work hours. This will include reasonable travel time and reasonable travel expenses where significant travel is required to access a vaccination site.

Employees with caring responsibilities are encouraged to discuss any issues relating to attending a scheduled vaccine appointment with their Manager.

Is support available if I am required to attend a vaccination appointment outside of my normal work hours?

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.

What do I do while I wait to get a vaccine?

Whether you are in a priority group or not, the best thing you can do is stay up to date and continue to be COVIDSafe. Further information about how vaccines will roll-out over the coming months will be provided.

In the meantime, everyone still needs to continue to:

- Stay at least 1.5 metres away from others
- Wash your hands often with soap and warm water. Use alcohol-based hand sanitiser when out and about.
- Stay at home if you are unwell and always cover coughs and sneezes.
- Get tested for COVID-19 if you have any cold or flu-like symptoms.
- Be aware of, and follow, current gathering, business and travel restrictions.

After I get vaccinated, can I go to work as normal?

After receiving a vaccination you can attend work as normal.

You may experience minor side effects following vaccination. Most side effects last no more than a couple of days. Personal leave should be taken for any side effects which prevent you from returning to work.

If you develop COVID-19 symptoms following your vaccination you should not attend work and follow the Public Health advice which can be obtained from the Tasmanian Government Coronavirus website at www.coronavirus.tas.gov.au and may include:

- Arranging a COVID-19 test
- Self-isolating until you receive a negative test result.

The COVID-19 vaccine side effects symptom checker on the Australian Government Department of Health website at www.health.gov.au can be used if you have concerns about any symptoms after your vaccine, noting that this is not a substitute for medical advice.

Where can I get more information?

Further information about COVID-19 can be obtained by visiting the Tasmanian Government Coronavirus website at www.coronavirus.tas.gov.au

FAQs on vaccination by the Department of Health Tasmania can be found on the Tasmanian Government Coronavirus website at www.coronavirus.tas.gov.au

Information related to COVID-19 and State Service employment can be found on the DPAC website at www.dpac.tas.gov.au

Further information about Australia's vaccine roll-out program, can be found on the Australian Government Department of Health website at www.health.gov.au

For more information about the Therapeutic Goods Administration's (TGA) process to approve vaccines for use in Australia, visit the TGA website at www.tga.gov.au

Other reputable information about vaccines is available from:

- Australian Academy of Science website at www.science.org.au
- World Health Organisation website at www.who.int
- National Centre for Immunisation Research and Surveillance website at www.ncirs.org.au