



# Circular 2021/01 - COVID-19 vaccinations

## Purpose

1. The purpose of this Circular is to provide information to Commonwealth agencies and their employees on the Australian Government's national roll-out of COVID-19 vaccinations.

## National Roll-out Strategy

2. 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](#).
3. The Roll-out Strategy explains the process by which COVID-19 vaccinations will be made available to different population groups, prioritised on medical grounds.
4. The Roll-out Strategy applies to the entire Australian public, including the Australian Public Service (APS).

## Prioritisation

5. The Roll-out Strategy has been developed by the Department of Health and is based on medical advice that prioritises individuals in Australia who are vulnerable to the coronavirus, are at increased risk of exposure, or who are working in jobs critical for managing the pandemic response.
6. COVID-19 vaccinations to Commonwealth employees based in Australia will be determined by the Roll-out Strategy.
7. 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. The APS will be vaccinated in line with the criteria for the Australian population.
8. A separate vaccination strategy is being developed by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Department of Defence for Australian Government employees and Defence personnel and their dependents who are currently deployed/posted, or are about to deploy or be posted, overseas.

## Vaccination requirements

9. Vaccination is voluntary and strongly encouraged in Australia. COVID-19 vaccination will be made available, free to everyone in Australia who chooses to be vaccinated. The Government has said that it does not intend to make the COVID-19 vaccination mandatory for all Australians or for Commonwealth employees.

10. State and territory governments may make public health orders requiring the vaccination of workers in identified high risk workplaces or industries. Commonwealth workers in a relevant high risk category would also need to comply with these public health orders.
11. Decisions to require vaccination within particular workplaces or job roles is a matter for individual Agency Heads. Employment guidance is expected to be released by [Safe Work Australia](#) and the [Fair Work Ombudsman](#).
12. Agencies should be mindful of their obligations under work health and safety laws to ensure the health and safety of workers and others while at work, so far as it is reasonably practicable.
13. Agencies should also remain mindful of their obligations under the *Privacy Act 1988*, noting that employers would not typically be able to require an employee to declare their vaccination status without consent, unless such a declaration is required by legislation or a state or territory health order.

### **Support for employees**

14. Where the Roll-out Strategy provides vaccination for a particular workforce, it is up to individual agencies to identify and support its relevant workforce to receive the vaccination.
15. Agencies should provide the greatest support possible to assist employees in receiving a COVID-19 vaccination, consistent with the Roll-out Strategy. Appropriate support measures may include providing:
  - a. certification that particular employees fit a priority group for vaccination because of their work;
  - b. paid time to receive vaccinations, including reasonable travel time; and
  - c. reasonable travel expenses, where significant travel is required to access a vaccination site.
16. Agencies may also wish to consider what support they may be able to offer employees with carer responsibilities.
17. Employers are to provide advice and information to employees on vaccinations as it becomes available from the Department of Health [website](#).
18. Agencies are to continue to meet their obligations under work health and safety legislation by consulting directly with employees and their representatives on matters of workplace health and safety.

### **Continuation of COVID-safe practices in workplaces**

19. Vaccines will be a critical part of Australia's ongoing response to COVID-19 in tandem with physical distancing, hygiene and cleaning protocols, occupancy limits and modified workplace attendance arrangements. Vaccinations will complement existing prevention and control measures including those outlined in [Circular 2020/9: Returning to Usual Workplaces](#).
20. Agencies and employees are to continue monitoring public health requirements and maintain COVID-safe workplaces regardless of whether employees in the workplace are vaccinated. The Commonwealth Chief Medical Officer has confirmed the continuing importance of these measures in reducing the impact of COVID-19 on the community.
21. Agencies seeking further information should send enquiries to [COVID19@apsc.gov.au](mailto:COVID19@apsc.gov.au).