

FAQ COVID-19 Vaccinations for Meat Industry Workers

• When will I get my vaccination?

- COVID-19 immunisation is being rolled out in phases, as vaccine becomes available. The roll out is happening more slowly than originally planned, so immunisation for all meat workers may not be available for some weeks or months.
- Phase 1a started on 22 February 2021, and is targeting front line health and quarantine workers, the residents of aged care and managed care facilities and the staffs of those facilities, and other groups deemed as very high risk.
- Workers in the meat processing industry have access to the vaccine in Phase 1b, which started on the 22nd March 2021.
- This vaccination program is the largest in Australia's history and so will take time to roll out.

• What vaccine will I get?

- The two vaccines that are being used in Phase 1b are the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine (which is also being used in Phase 1a) and the AstraZeneca vaccine.
- While both of these vaccines are safe and effective, the AstraZeneca vaccine is currently recommended only for people over the age of 50 years. Please see question below regarding AstraZeneca and the recent changes in recommendations.
- Both vaccines need two doses to have their maximum benefit; for the Pfizer vaccine, the doses should be 3 weeks apart, and for the AstraZeneca vaccine between 4 and 12 weeks apart.

• Do I need to get the vaccine twice? Why can't I just get it once?

- Yes, you need to get the vaccine twice, according to the interval that is right for the vaccine you receive. When the Pfizer and the AstraZeneca vaccines that are being used in Australia were first tested, it was realized that they had the best effect in providing protection if two doses were given; this seems to work best to stimulate people's immune systems to fight the virus most effectively.

• How much will the vaccines cost?

- Covid-19 vaccines will be free of charge.

• How safe are the vaccines?

- Any vaccine used in Australia has to be approved by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA), which carries out a very intense assessment process of potential COVID-19 vaccines to ensure that they are safe and effective. TGA is recognized internationally as being an excellent regulatory authority. All vaccines are thoroughly tested for safety before they are approved for use in Australia.
- Even after a vaccine is approved for use, TGA checks the quality of every batch of vaccine before releasing it for use.
- TGA will continue to monitor the vaccine from roll out to full distribution and use.
- As a result of the monitoring process that is carried out for vaccines, the TGA and Commonwealth Department of Health recently changed recommendations for the AstraZeneca vaccine, to restrict its use to people over 50 years of age.

- **Is it safe to get the AstraZeneca vaccine given some countries have reported blood clot side effects?**

- The AstraZeneca vaccine is still considered to be a safe and effective vaccine by regulatory authorities internationally, but because of rare occurrences of blood clots in some younger people who received the vaccine, it is now recommended only to be used for people over 50 years of age.
- The risk of developing blood clots from the AstraZeneca vaccine is very low; current information is that around 4 to 6 people out of every million people receiving their first dose of vaccine will develop blood clots. The TGA is constantly reviewing current research and making thorough assessments of the local cases to make current and safe decisions for the Australian population.
- The risk of blood clots appears to be higher for younger people; for people over the age of 50, the risk of any adverse event is very low, but the risk of serious illness or death from COVID-19 is very high; because of this, AstraZeneca vaccine is still recommended for people over 50 years of age.
- The risk of blood clots appears to occur only with the first dose of AstraZeneca vaccine. People who have had the first dose of AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine without any serious adverse effects can be given the second dose, including adults under 50 years of age.
- Vaccination against COVID-19 should continue, with the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine the preferred option in those under 50 years of age. The risk of severe outcomes from COVID-19 disease still very much outweighs any risk of adverse reactions, especially in older adults.

- **How does vaccination work with other vaccinations, like flu or Q fever?**

- There is currently no evidence of any safety issue in using COVID-19 vaccine with any other vaccines, but because it is a new vaccine, in order to be extra careful, it is currently recommended that there should be an interval of at least 14 days between immunization with COVID-19 vaccine and any other vaccine.
- If someone has received a flu vaccine or Q fever vaccine two weeks before or after receiving a COVID-19 vaccine, their immune system will respond to each vaccine they have received separately, and they will develop protection against each of the diseases.

- **How do the vaccines work?**

- The vaccines work to stimulate a person's immune system to fight against the virus that causes COVID-19.
- Vaccination creates what is called an immune response, this makes a person's immune system ready to react if they become infected with the virus that causes COVID-19 disease, so that they can effectively fight the infection.
- The vaccines approved for use in Australia have been shown to be very effective at creating an immune response that works to stop people from becoming seriously ill or dying from COVID-19.

- **Why should I get it?**

- Getting a COVID-19 vaccination helps protect you, your community, and your loved ones. Both of the vaccines being used in the early phases of the rollout are very good at protecting vaccinated people against severe illness and death. Both vaccines may also help to stop the spread of the virus that causes COVID-19, although the evidence for this is still being collected.

- **Once I have had a vaccination, do I still need to take other precautions to stop the spread of COVID-19?**
 - Yes. A COVID-19 vaccine is just one part of keeping the community safe and healthy. It is important for everyone to continue COVID-Safe practises such as hand hygiene, physical distancing and wearing masks when required – do not forget, it will take several months for vaccine to be offered to everyone in the community, and vulnerable people still need to be protected from infection.
- **Can I still get the virus if I am vaccinated?**
 - It is not clear yet whether or not vaccination against COVID-19 will stop every vaccinated person from catching the virus; it is clear that vaccination is very good at preventing serious sickness or death from COVID-19, but we are still learning about how good the vaccines are at stopping infections, or, if vaccinated people get infected, how good vaccines are at stopping further spread.
- **Can I still transmit the virus if I'm vaccinated?**
 - It is not clear yet if the vaccines will completely prevent infection with the virus that causes COVID-19, or if they will stop infected people from passing the virus on to others. This is one reason why it is critical for everyone, including vaccinated people, to keep taking other precautions to stop the spread of COVID-19.
 - The vaccines are not live COVID-19 viruses, and vaccination itself does not cause a person to become infected, so there is no risk of a vaccinated person 'spreading' the virus by being vaccinated.
- **If I get vaccinated and I catch COVID-19, can I transmit it to a surface (including meat)?**
 - It is not yet clear if the vaccines will completely stop a vaccinated person from being infected, so there may still be the possibility that a vaccinated person who comes into contact with the virus could still spread that virus to other people or contaminate surfaces with the virus. To guard against this possibility, it is critical for everyone to continue to follow all COVID-Safe practices, even when they are vaccinated.
- **Why are there still so many questions about what the vaccine can or cannot do?**
 - Vaccines against the virus that causes COVID-19 are all relatively new. Because the vaccines that will be used in Australia have been tested extensively and used in many countries, we do know that they are safe, and that they protect people very effectively against becoming seriously sick, or dying, from COVID-19. However, there are a lot of other things we don't know yet, including how well the vaccines work to stop virus spreading from one infected person to another. The more that vaccines are used, the more we will learn about what they can and can't do.
- **Do people who have had COVID-19 and recovered need to get vaccinated?**

- The short answer is yes, those people are recommended to be vaccinated. The long-term effects of COVID-19 exposure is still not known but there is evidence to suggest that those that have had COVID-19 should still be vaccinated to strengthen their own immunity but also prevent the spread to others.
- **Can children have a COVID-19 Vaccine?**
 - Children under 16 years of age cannot have the Pfizer vaccine, and currently the AstraZeneca vaccine is not recommended for people under 50 years of age.
 - This is because we do not yet have enough clinical trial results to confirm that the vaccines are effective and safe in younger age groups. Clinical trials in children are planned or are underway, and in the future children may be able to receive vaccines.