

Thursday 30 September 2021

CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

Update 58

COVID-19 vaccination directive issued – all healthcare settings

The Victorian Chief Health Officer on 30 September published the directions regarding requirements for workers in all healthcare settings to be vaccinated against COVID-19. These directions are consistent with those issued for aged care workers and those in other states and territories across the country. They apply to all workers or contractors in health care settings, including those working in shops located within health settings.

The directions apply to all Victorian healthcare workers including nurses, midwives, maternal and child health nurses, those working in the student employment models - Registered Undergraduate Students of Nursing (RUSONs) and Registered Undergraduate Students of Midwifery (RUSOMs) and nursing and midwifery students on clinical placement.

Worker obligations

From 15 October 2021 all healthcare workers at public, private, and not-for profit healthcare settings in Victoria must be able to, as a minimum, provide evidence showing they have:

1. received at least their first dose of a COVID-19 vaccine by 15 October 2021, or
2. an appointment to receive at least their first dose by 29 October 2021, or
3. a medical exemption evidenced by an authorised medical practitioner.

From 30 October 2021, healthcare workers must be able to provide evidence showing they have:

1. a full COVID-19 vaccination of two doses, or
2. one COVID-19 vaccination dose and a booking for a second by 15 December 2021, or
3. a medical exemption evidenced by an authorised medical practitioner.

Authorised by Lisa Fitzpatrick ANMF (Vic Branch) Secretary

Employer obligations

Between 15 and 29 October 2021, employers must ensure workers who have not provided evidence of their vaccination or valid medical exemption do not enter the healthcare setting unless they:

1. provide evidence that they have an appointment to be vaccinated by 29 October 2021, and
2. wear additional personal protective equipment (at a minimum, a surgical mask and face shield, though certain healthcare settings may require higher levels of PPE), at all times that they are present at the healthcare settings.

From 30 October 2021 employers cannot allow a worker entry to the healthcare setting unless that worker has provided evidence of:

1. a full COVID-19 vaccination of two doses
2. one COVID-19 vaccination dose and a booking for a second by 15 December 2021
3. a medical exemption evidenced by an authorised medical practitioner.

From 15 December 2021, employers must ensure all workers entering the setting are fully vaccinated or have provided evidence of a medical exemption.

Medical exemptions

If you are unable to be vaccinated due to a medical contraindication as determined by ATAGI clinical guidance you will be required to provide evidence to your employer from an authorised medical practitioner. This evidence must be from one of the following:

- a) a general practice registrar on an approved 3GA training placement
- b) a public health physician
- c) an infectious disease physician
- d) a clinical immunologist
- e) gynaecologists
- f) obstetricians
- g) a GP who is vocationally registered
- h) a GP who is a fellow of the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners
- i) a GP who is a fellow of the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine.

Your GP will be able to advise you if they meet one of the above criteria.

Temporary exception

In limited circumstances temporary exceptions to the direction can be approved by the operator of a healthcare facility, in relation to:

- a) a worker whose work or duties at a healthcare setting are necessary to provide for **urgent and unforeseen** specialist clinical or medical care due to an emergency or unforeseen circumstance such as organ donation or retrieval.
- b) **unforeseen** circumstances (e.g. mass furlough following an outbreak) where workers need to be deployed to fill vacancies to provide urgent care, maintain the quality of patient care or to continue essential operations of the healthcare service.

Workers with temporary exceptions will be required to wear PPE of at least a surgical mask and face shield, noting the PPE guidance may be higher depending on the setting or work.

The full Victorian Chief Health Officer directions are available via <https://bit.ly/3hroSwW>

Read the 'Department of Health's Healthcare worker update – COVID-19 vaccination requirements' at the end of this PDF or via <https://bit.ly/39OclrZ>

Frequently asked questions

1. Do I have to get vaccinated to keep working?

Yes, to continue working you will need to be vaccinated against COVID-19 unless you have a valid medical exemption.

2. What if I can't get an appointment in time?

Vaccination appointments are available through participating doctors' clinics, pharmacies, community health services or state vaccination centres.

Nurses and midwives can book a priority appointment (Pfizer or Moderna regardless of age) at state vaccination centres. **Call the Victorian Government Coronavirus Hotline on 1800 675 398** and tell the hotline operator you are a healthcare worker.

Public sector nurses and midwives have access to half a day's paid leave (though many employers have provided vaccination opportunities at their workplaces and through in-reach programs) to have your vaccination. Up to four days special leave are available if symptoms after receiving your vaccine prevent you from attending work. The public sector enterprise agreement personal leave evidence requirements apply.

3. I have a valid medical exemption can I keep working?

Yes, provided you give evidence to your employer from an authorised medical practitioner before 15 October 2021.

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4. I haven't been vaccinated yet - what happens to me?

You have a window in which to be vaccinated, from 30 October 2021 your employer cannot allow you entry to the facility unless you have provided evidence of either:

- a) a full COVID-19 vaccination of two doses, or
- b) one COVID-19 vaccination dose and a booking that will take place no later than 15 December, for a second dose; or
- c) a valid medical exemption.

5. Can I be penalised?

There are two circumstances where individual staff may be subject to a penalty of up to \$10,904.40 (60 penalty units) in relation to COVID-19 vaccination:

- a) **False or misleading information** – you must not give false or misleading information or documents, or make false or misleading statements in respect to your vaccination status.
- b) **False or misleading entries** – you must not make an entry in a document that is false or misleading, such as registering someone as having been vaccinated when you knew that was untrue.

It is a defence to the charge if you can prove that at the time at which the offence is alleged to have been committed, you believed on reasonable grounds that the information, statement or document was true or was not misleading.

6. What about visitors to healthcare services?

Vaccination is strongly encouraged for anyone entering a healthcare setting, but it is not currently required. ANMF continues to advocate for this requirement.

Read the Victorian Government 'Information for workers required to be vaccinated frequently asked questions' via <https://bit.ly/3F3E4wH>

Federal ANMF COVID-19 vaccination position

Nurses, midwives and aged care personal care workers work with vulnerable patients, clients and residents. Immunisation is reasonable in these settings as part of a range of infection control measures.

ANMF supports required immunisation against COVID-19 for nurses, midwives and personal care workers, unless there is a medical exemption, to protect yourself, your colleagues, your family, your patients and the community.

For the same reasons, ANMF is advocating that there should also be a vaccination requirement of visitors to aged and healthcare services.

Read the Federal ANMF COVID-19 vaccination position <https://anmfvic.asn.au/covidvacps>

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Science of vaccines webinar

ANMF encourages all members to be informed about COVID-19 vaccines. The fast-moving pace of COVID-19 science both from disease progression and treatments has been hard to keep up with. Nurses and midwives are well-positioned to advocate for science and safety.

In a webinar hosted by Federal ANMF on 26 August 2021, Dr Jessica Stokes-Parish (RN, PhD) and nurse immuniser Romy Blacklaw presented the safety processes, research, surveillance of adverse events (including data on safety so far) and the difference between COVID-19 vaccines.

Members can view the 'Vaccine science in the context of COVID-19' webinar (1 hour CPD) via the ANMF (Vic Branch) CPD Portal via <https://anmfvic.asn.au/vacscience>

ANMF Job Reps and Health and Safety Reps are encouraged to display this newsflash on their workplace noticeboard.

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Healthcare worker update – COVID-19 vaccination requirements

Today the Victorian Chief Health Officer issued a direction requiring Victorian healthcare workers to be vaccinated against COVID-19, recognising the critical role that vaccination plays in the safety of both the workforce and patients.

The formal direction follows the announcement by the Premier on 19 September 2021 that healthcare workers would be the next workforce to have COVID-19 vaccination become a requirement to work, drawing on a recommendation from the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee to National Cabinet.

From 15 October 2021, healthcare workers will be required to have received at least a first dose of a COVID-19 vaccine, or an appointment to receive at least their first COVID-19 vaccine by 29 October 2021, or a medical exemption to be able to come to work.

By 15 December 2021, all healthcare workers must provide evidence of their full COVID-19 vaccination of two doses, or a medical exemption by authorised medical practitioner.

Operators of healthcare settings must also keep a record of workers' vaccination status, in line with the direction issued by the Chief Health Officer.

The COVID-19 vaccine is safe, effective and free. Healthcare workers continue to have priority access for COVID-19 vaccination appointments. To book a reserved appointment, healthcare workers can call the Coronavirus Hotline on 1800 675 398 or contact a GP, pharmacy or community health service.

These measures are part of the Victorian Government's ongoing efforts to protect healthcare workers and patients from COVID-19.

Further information on the requirement for healthcare workers to be vaccinated can be found [here](#). The formal Chief Health Officer direction can be found [here](#).

Which healthcare workers are required to be vaccinated?

A healthcare worker is a person (including a volunteer or student) that is employed or engaged as a contractor to perform work at a healthcare setting:

- Direct Care and Interaction Roles
 - Medical practitioner, dental professional, nurse and midwife
 - Allied health professional (AHPRA-registered and Department of Health Classification)
 - Patient care attendant
 - Registered Undergraduate Student of Nursing (RUSON) or Midwifery (RUSOM)
 - Phlebotomists and pathology worker
 - Lifestyle and social therapy
 - Formal language and interpretation service

- Administrative and Ancillary Roles
 - Administrative, clerical, and managerial worker, including assistant and delegate worker
 - Food preparation, cleaning, laundry
 - Patient service assistant, porter
 - Operating theatre technicians
 - Security, maintenance and repair, information technology, gardening and landscaping
- Ambulance and Patient Transport Service Roles
- Workers in businesses operating within health facilities (e.g. cafés, restaurants, newsagents and florist within a healthcare setting).

Students on placement at a healthcare setting and volunteers engaged to undertake duties at a healthcare setting are also required to be vaccinated.

The requirement applies to those working at healthcare settings, not those that work at another worksite (such as head office where no health services are delivered, unless they are required to attend the healthcare setting where care is delivered) or in a community setting (such as providing care into people's homes) – unless they also work in a healthcare setting.

What healthcare settings are in scope?

Healthcare settings at which all workers will be required to be vaccinated are:

- Hospitals (including outpatient setting and in-reach services)
- Ambulance and patient transport services
- Community health centres and services (including community-based mental health services, maternal and child health services, and drug and alcohol counselling services)
- General practice settings
- COVID-19 related healthcare delivery settings, including testing sites, vaccination centres, and hotel quarantine
- Dental surgeries and practices
- Day procedure centres
- Health clinics (e.g. where health appointments are delivered by medical specialists, nurse practitioners and/or allied health professionals)
- Pharmacies
- Diagnostic and medical imaging centres
- Mobile health services
- Blood donation services
- Educational settings where health care students undertake placements and internships
- Health services embedded in other government agencies or sectors (e.g. healthcare workers providing services in correction settings)
- Businesses operating within healthcare settings (e.g. workers at the café/restaurant/newsagent/florist within a hospital)

Where can I find the Direction issued by the Chief Health Officer?

The relevant Direction issued by the Chief Health Officer is located on the department's [website here](#).

The Direction explains how the vaccination requirements will apply to healthcare workers and operators.

All operators and workers are encouraged to review the public health order to understand the scope of healthcare workers required to be vaccinated as well as the limited exemptions that may apply.

All operators should now be confirming with their workforce whether they have received their minimum first dose of a COVID-19 vaccine.

All workers should now be providing evidence to their employer of their vaccination status.

Do workers need to provide evidence of their vaccination status?

Yes. Workers should provide evidence of their COVID-19 vaccination status, or of an authorised exemption to vaccination, to their employer before 15 October 2021.

There are two ways workers can provide evidence of their vaccination status:

- Online [immunisation history statement](#) – this displays all vaccinations or medical contraindications and authorised exemptions, including COVID-19, that have been reported to the Australian Immunisation Register (AIR). All vaccine providers must upload vaccinations to the AIR.
- COVID-19 Digital Certificate from the [Australian Immunisation Register](#) - this is for individuals who have received all required doses of a COVID-19 vaccine in Australia.

You can access your Immunisation History Statement:

- online, by setting up your own [myGov](#) account and then accessing your [Medicare online](#) account; or
- through the [Express Plus Medicare](#) mobile app; or
- by calling the Australian Immunisation Register enquiries line on **1800 653 809** (8am-5pm, Monday to Friday AEST) and asking them to send your statement to you. Please allow up to 14 days to receive your statement in the post; or
- by asking your doctor or vaccination provider to print a copy of your statement for you.

People do not need to have a Medicare card to be able to access their Immunisation History Statement.

Information is available for healthcare workers on how to prove their COVID-19 vaccination status, including step by step guides on how to get [Proof of vaccination](#) with or without a Medicare card.

What if a worker can't provide their Immunisation History Statement by 15 October 2021?

Some workers may be unable to produce their Immunisation History Statement if they were only vaccinated in the days leading up to the 15 October 2021 deadline. This could be because the vaccine provider has not uploaded the person's vaccination record to the Australian Immunisation Register.

If a worker is unable to get a copy of their Immunisation History Statement prior to 15 October 2021, they should:

- advise the operator of the relevant healthcare setting where and when they received their first dose COVID-19 vaccination, and
- provide alternate evidence such as proof of their vaccination appointment or a signed declaration that they have received a minimum first dose.

Workers must then provide a copy of their Immunisation History Statement or show their COVID-19 Digital Certificate as soon as possible.

Operators should record the worker as being vaccinated but is responsible for following up to ensure the worker provides the required proof of vaccination.

What if a worker cannot get vaccinated before the 15 October 2021 deadline?

Between 15 and 29 October 2021, employers cannot allow a healthcare worker who has not provided evidence of their vaccination from entering their health facility unless they:

- provide evidence that they have an appointment to be vaccinated by 29 October 2021, and
- wear additional personal protective equipment (at a minimum, a surgical mask and face shield, though certain health facilities may require higher levels of PPE), at all times that they are present at the health facility.

All healthcare workers continue to have priority access to receive COVID-19 vaccination.

Workers are encouraged to seek the support of their employer to receive their vaccine now. All providers must support their workers to access a COVID-19 vaccine. Public sector healthcare workers are able to access half a day of special paid leave to receive their vaccination.

What do I need to know about exemptions to the requirement to be vaccinated?

Medical exemptions are possible in a limited number of cases. The Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) recommended medical exemptions align with the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation ([ATAGI clinical guidance on COVID-19 vaccine in Australia in 2021](#)).

Healthcare workers will need evidence from a medical practitioner about a medical exemption – such as a medical certificate or a letter.

In limited circumstances an operator of a healthcare setting can also approve temporary exceptions:

- for a worker whose work or duties at the healthcare setting are necessary to provide urgent specialist clinical or medical care due to an emergency or critical unforeseen circumstance (e.g. organ donation or retrieval), or
- for a worker that is deployed to fill vacancies to provide urgent care, maintain the quality of care for patients or ensure the continued essential operations of the healthcare service due to an emergency or critical unforeseen circumstance (e.g. mass furlough following an outbreak), or
- for a worker who is required to respond to an emergency at the healthcare setting

Consistent with national approaches, the public health direction does not allow exemptions on religious, political or personal grounds.

Operators of healthcare settings should carefully consider the formal public health order.

While individuals are personally responsible for complying with COVID-19 vaccination requirements, providers must also take reasonable steps to ensure non-compliant workers do not enter and remain at their facility.

Operators are encouraged to review information on the [Fair Work Australia website](#) which steps out COVID-19 vaccinations, workplace rights and obligations.