COVID-19 Boosters: Know the facts!

There is a lot of confusing and incorrect information being shared about COVID-19 vaccines. Always make sure you get the facts from reliable sources.

Four vaccines are available for use in Australia.

There are four vaccines approved for use in Australia: Pfizer (Comirnaty), Moderna (Spikevax), AstraZeneca (Vaxzevria) and Novavax (Nuvaxovid).

The Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) recognises several other vaccines from overseas as well.

What COVID-19 vaccines are used for a booster?

The Pfizer and Moderna mRNA vaccines are used for COVID-19 booster doses for people aged 18 years and older. It doesn't matter which COVID-19 vaccine you had for your earlier doses.

The Pfizer and Moderna Bivalent COVID-19 vaccines are now available for people aged 18+ and specifically target the original COVID-19 virus and the Omicron variant.

People aged 16 and 17 years old receive the Pfizer vaccine for their booster.

The AstraZeneca vaccine can be used when an mRNA vaccine cannot be used for medical reasons or a person declines vaccination with an mRNA vaccine. The Novavax vaccine can be used if no other COVID-19 vaccine is considered suitable.

Who can have a COVID-19 booster?

If you're aged 16 years or over, and it's been at least three months since you received your second dose of a COVID-19 vaccine, it's strongly recommended you get a booster dose now.

You can receive your COVID-19 booster vaccination:

- **3 months after your second COVID-19 vaccination; or**
- **3 months after a confirmed COVID-19 infection if you've had COVID-19 since your second COVID-19 vaccination.**

Who can have an additional COVID-19 booster?

Everyone aged 50 and over is strongly recommended to get an additional COVID-19 booster (second booster) to help keep your immunity strong. People aged 30 and over can also get an additional COVID-19 booster.

You can receive your additional COVID-19 booster vaccination:

- **3 months after your first booster dose; or**
- **3 months after a confirmed COVID-19 infection if you've had COVID-19 since your first booster dose.**

A COVID-19 booster helps 'boost' your immunity

The COVID-19 booster dose reminds your immune system how to recognise and fight the COVID-19 virus. This means if you encounter the virus after vaccination, your immune system can tackle it faster and more effectively, helping to protect you from serious illness.

A booster strengthens your immunity and long-term protection against COVID-19. Two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine is not enough – getting your booster is an important way to maximise your protection and help stop you from getting really sick.

Staying up to date with your vaccinations by having a COVID-19 booster dose will also continue to help protect you, your loved ones and your community against COVID-19.

Evidence shows a COVID-19 booster works

Evidence from around the world shows that a COVID-19 booster works very well against the Omicron variant of COVID-19.

A COVID-19 booster dose restores your protection:

- **Against serious illness up to 95%**
- **Against death, by around 95% or more.**

A COVID-19 booster will help protect you and reduce the spread of the virus. Getting your COVID-19 booster also helps to protect your family and friends especially those at higher risk of serious illness.

You can still get a booster if you've already had COVID-19

If you've had COVID-19 once, you can still catch the virus again. To keep your immunity strong, you need to stay up to date with your vaccinations.

If you are eligible for a booster, or additional COVID-19 booster, it is recommended that you wait 3 months after your COVID-19 infection. Get your booster as soon as possible after 3 months to strengthen your protection.

You can still get a COVID-19 booster if you are pregnant, breastfeeding or trying to get pregnant

If you are infected with COVID-19 when you are pregnant, you are at higher risk of severe illness and complications, including premature birth, infant distress and ICU admission and stillbirth.

A COVID-19 booster will help protect you and reduce your risks during pregnancy.

The Pfizer and Moderna mRNA and Bivalent vaccines are preferred for pregnant and breastfeeding women. The COVID-19 booster dose is safe to have at any stage of pregnancy, and while breastfeeding, to help protect you and your baby.

If you are young and healthy, or have already had COVID-19, you should still get your COVID-19 booster

Many young people have needed hospital or even intensive care because of COVID-19. You should get vaccinated to help protect yourself, your family and friends.

COVID-19 spreads easily, and the Omicron sub-variants are highly transmissible. They can also cause serious illness in those that get it. This can put your family and friends at greater risk if you are infected. A COVID-19 booster will help protect you and those close to you so we can keep doing the things we love doing.

The risk of side effects doesn't mean I shouldn't get boosted

All the COVID-19 vaccines that are approved in Australia have good safety information.

Millions of doses of the vaccine have already been given safely, protecting people around the world from COVID-19.

You may experience common, mild side effects when getting your booster dose, similar to those after the first two doses. They can include a sore arm, fever, muscle aches or feeling tired.

There is no need to worry. This is normal and it means your immune system is responding to the vaccine. If you are concerned, speak to your GP.

COVID-19 vaccines have not been developed too quickly to be safe

COVID-19 vaccines are built on many years of research, with scientists from around the world working together to ensure all testing and approval steps were taken.

All the vaccines available in Australia have been approved by the TGA. The TGA checks for safety, quality and effectiveness. COVID-19 vaccines must meet the same standards as any other vaccine approved for use in Australia.

The COVID-19 virus is much more dangerous than COVID-19 vaccines

COVID-19 vaccination will prevent serious illness and death in people of all ages. Serious reactions from the vaccines are extremely rare, which is why it's more important than ever to follow the health advice and protect our community.

Risk of complications from catching the virus are higher than the side-effects of vaccination with most side effects being mild and resolved after a day or two.

The risk of side effects doesn't mean I shouldn't get boosted

Depending on the type of vaccine, ingredients may include:

- a protein component of a virus
- a piece of genetic code (DNA or mRNA)
- a very small dose of a weakened virus
- a substance to boost the immune response (an adjuvant)
- a small amount of preservative
- sterile saltwater (saline) for injections.

For more information on the ingredients used in the COVID-19 vaccines, visit the **Australian Register of Therapeutic Goods**.

What is mRNA?

mRNA is made when the cell needs instructions to make proteins. DNA code is copied and shortened into messages called mRNA. The mRNA is transported into the cell. Once the mRNA arrives, the cell can produce proteins from these instructions. Once the instruction is read, the mRNA breaks down and clears from the cell.

mRNA is not a new invention from the lab. It's how the body has been making proteins, the basic building block of life, since humans have existed.

The COVID-19 Moderna and Pfizer vaccines are mRNA vaccines.

What is a protein-based vaccine?

The COVID-19 Novavax vaccine is a protein-based vaccine. This type of vaccine contains part of the coronavirus spike protein.

Your immune system cells recognise the spike protein as a threat and begin building an immune response against it.

The Novavax vaccine also has an ingredient called the Matrix-M adjuvant. This helps create a stronger immune response to the vaccine.

None of the COVID-19 vaccines approved in Australia:

- contain egg or animal products
- contain any live virus and and cannot give you COVID-19
- can affect or interact with your DNA in any way
- contain anything that can track you
- are unsuitable for people from some religions or faiths.

The COVID-19 vaccines cannot alter your DNA or change your genes

COVID-19 vaccines do not alter your DNA or change your genes. Vaccines teach your body how to protect itself against COVID-19. They do not affect or interact with your DNA in any way.

After your COVID-19 booster

Getting your COVID-19 booster dose as soon as possible will make sure you've got plenty of immunity over the coming months.

It's also important to continue to practice measures to reduce your risk of catching and spreading the virus.

These measures include:

- **Staying at home and not attending any gatherings or having visitors to your home if you have COVID-19 symptoms (cough, runny nose, sore throat, fever).**
- **Getting tested immediately if you have any COVID-19 symptoms. If you are at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19, you should get a PCR test as they are more accurate and can help you access treatments such as COVID-19 antiviral medicines, if you are eligible. If you test positive for COVID-19 from a rapid antigen test, it is recommended you register your result with Service NSW to support access to care. Follow the testing positive to COVID-19 and managing COVID-19 at home advice available at nsw.gov.au.**
- **Consider doing a rapid antigen test (RAT) before visiting others at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19.**
- **Wearing a mask over your nose and mouth when required and when you're in crowded places or on public transport.**
- **Choosing to meet up with family and friends outdoors where you can. If you have to meet indoors, choose large well-ventilated spaces and open doors and windows.**
- **Washing your hands regularly and/or using hand sanitiser.**

Future COVID-19 doses

Experts in Australia and all over the world are tracking and researching the COVID-19 virus to better understand how long the vaccines will provide protection against COVID-19, as well as how well they protect us against new variants of the virus as they emerge.

The evidence they obtain will help to inform whether additional boosters will be needed in the future.

For more information:

If you have any concerns about getting vaccinated against COVID-19 talk to your doctor, Aboriginal Medical Service or Aboriginal Health Worker about what is best to help protect you. They can provide advice that's right for you and your family.

COVID-19 boosters are available across NSW from Aboriginal Medical Services, pharmacies, and GPs. Many places offer walk-ins. You can also get the whole family vaccinated against COVID-19 at the same time. This includes children aged 5 years and over.

For more information about COVID-19 vaccinations and boosters visit: **nsw.gov.au** or call the National Coronavirus Helpline on **1800 020 080** and press **Option 5** for assistance.

You can also SMS "**Hey EVA**" to **0481 611 382**. These messages are received by the National Coronavirus Helpline. You will receive a call back from a trained agent who will help you find a COVID-19 vaccine appointment based on your individual needs. This includes finding places where no appointment is needed (walk ins).