

TO: RCH RESIDENTS AND FAMILY MEMBERS

FROM: CEO – Graham Reed

DATE: 11 February 2021

SA Health has released an update on the proposed roll out of the COVID-19 vaccine to the South Australian population. As has been widely communicated through the main stream media, the Federal Government has developed a strategy to deliver COVID-19 vaccines to everyone living in Australia in a staged roll out commencing from late February 2021.

The Federal Government is responsible for the supply of the vaccines and State Governments are responsible for administering the vaccines.

Whilst the exact details of how this will be achieved in each state are still being developed, the following information has been provided for residents living in residential aged care and their families.

Importantly, residential aged care staff and residents will be among the first people who can choose to receive the vaccine in the first roll-out phase (Phase 1a).

Vaccine safety and effectiveness (Phase 1a)

The Therapeutic Goods Administration's (TGA) rigorous assessment process of potential COVID-19 vaccines will ensure approved vaccines are safe and effective.

All vaccines are thoroughly tested for safety before they are approved for use in Australia. This includes careful analysis of clinical trial data, ingredients, chemistry, manufacturing and other factors.

The Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine has been provisionally approved by the TGA for people 16 years and older. The approval is subject to strict conditions and Pfizer will be required to continue providing information to the TGA on the safety, efficacy and quality of the vaccine. More information on this approval is available on the Department of Health's website.

Provisional approval of the University of Oxford/AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine is currently anticipated in February, subject to approval by the TGA.

Patients and/or their families, representatives and carers can talk to their GP or a health professional about the COVID-19 vaccines.

COVID-19 vaccination for frail elderly people over 85 years of age

Specific advice for frail elderly people on receiving the COVID-19 vaccine will be provided by the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI).

The TGA have advised the potential benefits of vaccination versus the potential risk and clinical impact of even relatively mild systemic adverse events in the frail elderly should be carefully assessed on a case-by-case basis.

COVID-19 vaccination is voluntary, but strongly encouraged

COVID-19 vaccines will be safe, free and voluntary for everyone living in Australia.

The Australian Government and Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) strongly encourages everyone to get vaccinated

How the vaccine will be administered to residents

The Australian Government is responsible for leading the implementation of the COVID-19 Vaccination Program for the large majority of RACFs in consultation with state and territory governments.

Staff and residents in residential aged care facilities will be able to receive their vaccination in the RACF.

Information will be provided ahead of vaccinators attending the facility.

Additional skilled immunisation teams, separate to the RACF staff, will work in partnership with facilities and be appropriately trained to administer the vaccine to staff and residents in their facility.

More information will be provided in the coming weeks.

COVID-19 vaccines and the annual influenza vaccine

The Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) agrees that all available steps should be taken to maximise influenza vaccine coverage amongst the aged care workforce, residents and their carers.

Advice from the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) is that the preferred minimum interval between administration of either the Pfizer/BioNTech or the University of Oxford/AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccines and any influenza vaccine is 14 days. This is the current precautionary advice.

Obtaining consent and arranging immunisations

Appropriate consent will be obtained prior to vaccination. More information will be provided on consent for residents in RACFs and their family, representatives and carers soon.

Why should I get the vaccine?

Getting a COVID-19 vaccination helps protect you, your community and your loved ones.

Both the Pfizer/BioNTech and the University of Oxford/AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccines show they are very good at protecting against severe illness and death.

You can talk to your GP or a health professional about the COVID-19 vaccines and why vaccination is an important part of keeping the community safe and healthy.

The Therapeutic Goods Administration's (TGA) rigorous assessment process of potential COVID-19 vaccines will ensure approved vaccines are safe and effective.

What will happen if I choose not to get the vaccine?

Vaccination is voluntary.

If you are a resident in residential aged care, your decision to have or not to have the COVID-19 vaccination will not affect your care or your rights.

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 practices such as hand hygiene, physical distancing and wearing masks when required, particularly in residential aged care facilities.

Can I have both the COVID-19 vaccine and the annual influenza vaccine?

The Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) agrees that all available steps should be taken to maximise influenza vaccine coverage amongst the aged care workforce, residents and their carers.

Routine scheduling and giving an influenza vaccine with a COVID-19 vaccine on the same day is not currently recommended.

This recommendation from the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) is based on the current lack of direct data demonstrating absence of any safety issues or interference of immune responses after co-administration of the influenza and COVID-19 vaccines.

Advice from ATAGI is that the preferred minimum interval between administration of either the Pfizer/BioNTech or the University of Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccines and any influenza vaccine is 14 days. This is the current precautionary advice.

Keep up to date with trusted information

The Department of Health will continue to provide updates.

You can find more information on the roll out strategy, including translated information, on the Department of Health's COVID-19 vaccines website.

<https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2021/01/australia-s-covid-19-vaccine-national-roll-out-strategy.pdf>

You can also subscribe to receive the COVID-19 Vaccines Update.

You can also get regular updates via the Department of Health's social media channels on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram and YouTube.

You can also call the National Coronavirus Helpline on 1800 020 080, and ask for an interpreter if needed.

COVID-19 Vaccination - Safe - Effective - Free

Graham Reed
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