

# COVID-19 Vaccine Exemptions

Last updated: 18 February 2022

COVID-19 vaccines have been demonstrated to be safe and effective and are recommended for all people aged 5 years and over.

**There are very few situations where a COVID-19 vaccine may not be safe to use.**

Medical exemptions can only be granted if there are no suitable alternative COVID-19 vaccines available. For this reason, permanent medical exemptions to COVID-19 vaccination will be rarely required. **This factsheet outlines the circumstances in which your doctor can grant a medical exemption for receiving a COVID-19 vaccine.**

## What is an exemption?

An exemption is defined in a state or territory public health order and supporting information that sets out an acceptable reason that someone does not need to have a COVID-19 vaccine. Each state and territory's public health order and/or published supporting information sets out the exemptions relevant to that jurisdiction. You should refer to your jurisdiction's published information to understand the exemptions that apply in your state or territory.

## What qualifies for a COVID-19 vaccine exemption?

If you have a medical contraindication to one brand of COVID-19 vaccine, you will most likely be able to safely receive an alternate brand. Your doctor can only grant you a permanent medical exemption if you have medical contraindications to all available brands of COVID-19 vaccine.

Medical contraindications to COVID-19 vaccines include:

- **Anaphylaxis** (severe allergic reaction) to any component of the vaccine, which includes:
  - For Vaxzevria (AstraZeneca) and Nuvaxovid (Novavax): polysorbate 80
  - For Comirnaty (Pfizer) or Spikevax (Moderna): polyethylene glycol (PEG)
- **A serious adverse event** caused by a previous dose of the relevant COVID-19 vaccine (without anything else having been identified as causing the adverse event), and where it has been reported to a state/territory adverse event surveillance system or the TGA. It needs to be determined by a medical specialist or your trained vaccine provider that a second dose would risk the event occurring again.
- **For AstraZeneca:** history of capillary leak syndrome, cerebral venous sinus thrombosis, heparin-induced thrombocytopenia, idiopathic splanchnic thrombosis or antiphospholipid syndrome with thrombosis.

## What qualifies for a temporary COVID-19 vaccine exemption?

The Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) has advised that a temporary medical exemption is suitable in the following situations:

- Inflammatory cardiac illness within the past 3 months; myocarditis or pericarditis; acute rheumatic fever or acute rheumatic heart disease (i.e., with active myocardial inflammation); or acute decompensated heart failure

- Vaccination can be temporarily deferred up to 4 months after infection with COVID-19 and once the acute infection has resolved. *Please note prior infection with COVID-19 is not a medical contraindication*
- Until recovery from a major medical condition (such as major surgery or hospital admission for a serious illness)
- Serious adverse event caused by a previous dose of a COVID-19 vaccine, with no acceptable alternative vaccine available
- Following treatment with a monoclonal antibody for COVID-19
- In some instances, where the patient may be a risk to themselves or others during the vaccination process

People with prolonged symptoms from COVID-19 beyond 4 months should be vaccinated on a case by case basis. Chronic symptoms following COVID-19 ('Long COVID') are not a contraindication to COVID-19 vaccines but do warrant a clinical discussion with the patient.

Pregnancy is not a valid reason for exemption in the absence of any of the criteria listed above.

**Temporary exemptions to COVID-19 vaccination are not recommended to exceed 6 months.**

**If you have not experienced one of the above conditions, your doctor cannot grant you a medical exemption for COVID-19 vaccination.**

The issuing of a false or inappropriate medical exemption in contradiction to the current ATAGI advice could have serious ramifications for your health care provider. Your provider could face medical sanctions, civil penalties or even criminal prosecution.

The use of falsified medical exemption documentation is a criminal offence and those found issuing or using such items may face civil or criminal legal proceedings.

The Australian Government, in collaboration with states and territories, is actively monitoring the data for COVID-19 medical exemptions.

For detail on the public health order vaccination mandates that may apply in your state or territory, please visit the relevant health department or government website.

You may also wish to refer to the ATAGI temporary medical exemption advice <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/atagi-expanded-guidance-on-temporary-medical-exemptions-for-covid-19-vaccines>

You can also call the Disability Gateway on **1800 643 787** or the Coronavirus Hotline on **1800 020 080**.



If you need information in a language other than English, call the Translating and Interpreting Service on **131 450**.

If you are deaf, or have a hearing or speech impairment, you can call the National Relay Service on **133 677**.