

COVID-19 vaccines for people with cancer

Information for consumers

Information provided as at 24th January 2022 from Statewide Cancer Clinical Network. Please refer to SA Health directions and ATAGI guidelines for future updates.

The Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) regularly provide updates and new recommendations based on the changes in the COVID-19 pandemic and new emerging evidence. ATAGI recommendations are regularly updated, depending on the rapidly changing nature of the pandemic, please refer to the ATAGI guidelines [Clinical guidance for COVID-19](#)

People with cancer are high risk for severe Covid-19 infection

Research into COVID-19 and its effects indicates that people with active cancer or who are undergoing cancer treatment are at higher risk of severe COVID-19 infection and death when compared with the general population. People with active blood cancers are at especially high risk.

Research is also showing that people who have lowered immunity levels, such as cancer patients receiving chemotherapy treatment, may have an increased risk of severe infection or death from COVID-19 infection. Even if a person with low immunity does not become very unwell, we know that the virus takes longer to completely disappear from their body and can be spread to other people.

For these reasons, all people with a current cancer diagnosis, especially those who are receiving, or recently completed active treatment for cancer will be considered for early access for COVID-19 vaccination.

The Australian government, SA Health and ATAGI regularly provide updates and new recommendations based on the changes in the COVID-19 pandemic and new emerging evidence.

Approved Covid-19 vaccines in Australia

Currently four vaccines are approved in Australia – Pfizer/BioNTech SARS-Cov-2 vaccine (COMIRNATY™ COVID-19 VACCINE), Astra Zeneca ChAdox1 nCOV-19 vaccine (Vaxzevria), and Spikevax (Moderna) vaccine. The fourth COVID-19 vaccine Janssen is soon to be available.

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The Pfizer, Astra Zeneca and Moderna vaccines need two doses to be most effective.

COVID-19 vaccines do not provide immediate protection, and none are 100% effective. Therefore, precautions are still needed after vaccination. It is important to follow the instructions of your health care team.

Only a small number of people with cancer took part of the clinical trials that tested these vaccines. It is therefore important to remember there is limited information on the safety and effectiveness of the vaccines in people with cancer or on active cancer treatment. However, it is still important for cancer patients to be vaccinated where possible. If you have any concerns, please speak to your health professional.

Should I have a booster dose?

Booster dose is an additional dose of vaccine after the completion of the primary course of the vaccine.
(<https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/atagi-recommendations-on-the-use-of-a-booster-dose-of-covid-19-vaccine>). The primary course of vaccination for all the TGA approved COVID-19 vaccines except the COVID-19 Vaccine Janssen consists of two doses. Comirnaty (tozinameran) and Moderna vaccines are currently approved as booster dose in Australia. Anyone 18 years and older of age who have had the second dose of the primary course more than three months ago is eligible for a booster dose.

However, those with severe immunocompromise, the primary course is defined as three doses of a COVID-19 vaccine. They are eligible to receive the third dose between two and six months after the second dose. The third primary dose can either be Astra Zeneca, or Pfizer or Moderna vaccines. The Pfizer or Moderna vaccines are preferred over the Astra Zeneca vaccine; however, Astra Zeneca vaccine can also be used for those who received this vaccine for the first two doses.

Those eligible for a third dose are;

- people with active cancers,
- those who have had an organ transplantation or bone marrow/stem cell transplantation,
- people on immunosuppressive medications or taking high dose steroids,
- those born with immunodeficiencies and people on long-term dialysis.

Those receiving the third primary dose may be required to have a booster dose if recommended by ATAGI.

If you still have additional questions, please discuss with your health care providers.

More information is needed, and we ask that you report any reactions. The immunisation registry will collect data on any side effects from the vaccination.

Additional resources

- <https://www.health.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/COVID-19-vaccines>
- <https://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/public+content/sa+health+internet/conditions/infectious+diseases/COVID-19/vaccine/COVID-19+vaccinations>
- <https://www.canceraustralia.gov.au/COVID-19-vaccine-and-cancer>
- <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/health/oxford-astrazeneca-COVID-19-vaccine.html>
- [How the Pfizer-BioNTech Covid-19 Vaccine Works - The New York Times \(nytimes.com\)](https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/01/health/covid-vaccine-lymph-nodes.html)
- <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/01/health/covid-vaccine-lymph-nodes.html>

Acknowledgments

- This Document was developed by the Statewide Cancer Clinical Network (SCCN) and endorsed by the Clinical Advisory Group, COVID-19 Vaccination, DHW. Expert review provided by Cancer Voices SA