COVID-19 Stakeholder Kit

for 2023-2024
Supporting people with disability

Version 0.5 – updated December 2023

Contents

Overview

This stakeholder kit provides information and resources for organisations delivering services to people with disability. It recognises that some people with disability have a high risk of severe outcomes from COVID-19, including people with underlying health conditions, communication or access barriers, and those living in shared residential accommodation.

The kit aims to assist organisations to communicate the importance of preventative behaviours in reducing the risks posed by COVID-19 through provision of shareable information, including links to videos and factsheets. It also provides factual information providing the rationale for why this communication remains critical.

Key Messages

Top lines

- COVID-19 is still around and is a threat to people with disability.

- Some people with disability have health conditions that put them at greater risk of bad outcomes including death from COVID-19.

- The best way to protect yourself is to stay up to date with your COVID-19 vaccination.

- Every additional dose provides increased protection against serious illness and death from COVID-19.

Further information

- Find out about your eligibility for a COVID-19 booster by visiting www.health.gov.au, or talking to your healthcare provider.

- Assistance booking a vaccine is available for people with disability and their families, friends and providers through the Disability Gateway.

    o You can call on 1800 643 787 between the hours of 8am to 8pm, Monday to Friday.

- Some vaccination services can visit you in your home if you cannot travel to the service.

- The [flu and COVID-19 vaccine](#) can be given on the same day.

Current advice - overview

- People at risk of serious illness from COVID-19 are recommended to get a 2023 COVID-19 vaccine booster dose if it has been 6 months or more since their last COVID-19 vaccine or infection.

- People aged 75 years or over are recommended to have an additional 2023 booster it has been 6 months ago or longer since their last vaccination.

- People with severe immunocompromise or aged 65 or over should speak to a healthcare provider to discuss if they should get an additional 2023 booster.

- A primary course of vaccination against COVID-19 for people aged 5 years or older, and a booster dose for those eligible under the updated booster recommendations (even in individuals who have had past infection) are still recommended.

- Life-saving oral antiviral treatments are available for people at risk of severe illness from COVID-19. You will need to speak to your GP, nurse practitioner or pharmacist about getting a prescription for oral treatments.

- It is recommended that people with disability develop their own personal plan of what to do during a COVID-19 outbreak.

- You can be COVID-safe by wearing a mask, physical distancing and practicing good hygiene.

- If you test positive for COVID-19, you should stay at home while you are sick.

Everyone's responsibility

- Australia is likely to experience further waves of COVID-19 and the emergence of new variants.

- It is important to maintain COVID-safe behaviours that help protect you and those around you from COVID-19.

- The Department of Health and Aged Care has produced a short video highlighting the role all Australians can play in keeping themselves and other people at greater risk safe from COVID-19.

- Vaccination protects individuals, family members, and people in the community at greater risk from severe complications of COVID-19.

COVID-19 vaccines

- Research shows that COVID-19 vaccinations provide good protection against severe illness and death.

- Protection provided by the COVID-19 primary vaccine course decreases over time. A booster gives additional protection against severe illness from COVID-19.

- It is easy and free to get vaccinated from your local health professional, GP, Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service, or pharmacist.

- The Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) advice on COVID vaccination is updated from time to time.

- For COVID-19 vaccination recommendations visit the Department of Health and Aged Care website and search for ATAGI and COVID-19.

- Information about COVID-19 vaccines for people with disability is available in Auslan and Easy Read.

- The Department of Health and Aged Care has COVID-19 content available in translated information of over 60 languages.

- Regular updates on vaccination and related health issues are also provided through the Department of Health and Aged Care's Disability Provider Alerts.

- You can subscribe to these alerts by emailing the Department of Health and Aged Care: DisabilityCovidVaccineDelivery@Health.gov.au

Health advice

COVID-19 2023 booster advice

In February 2023, ATAGI *recommended* a 2023 COVID-19 vaccine booster dose for the following adults, if their last COVID-19 vaccine dose or confirmed infection was 6 months ago or longer, and regardless of the number of prior doses received:

- All adults aged 65 years and over

- Adults aged 18-64 years who have medical comorbidities that increase their risk of severe COVID-19, or people with disability in high-risk groups.

ATAGI advised the following people should *consider* a 2023 booster dose if their last COVID-19 vaccine dose or confirmed infection was 6 months ago or longer, and regardless of the number of prior doses received, based on an individual risk benefit assessment with their immunisation provider:

- All adults aged 18-64 years without risk factors for severe COVID-19

- Children and adolescents aged 5-17 years who have medical comorbidities that increase their risk of severe COVID-19, or disability with significant or complex health needs.

ATAGI advised that a 2023 booster dose is *not recommended* at this time for children and adolescents under the age of 18 who do not have any risk factors for severe COVID-19.

In September 2023, ATAGI *recommended* that all adults aged 75 years and over should receive an *additional* COVID-19 vaccine dose in 2023 if 6 months have passed since their last dose.

ATAGI advised the following people should *consider* an *additional* COVID-19 vaccine dose if 6 months have passed since their last dose, after discussion with their healthcare provider:

- All adults aged 65 to 74 years, and/or

- Adults aged 18 to 64 years with severe immunocompromise.

Within the above groups, an additional 2023 COVID-19 vaccine is likely to be of most benefit for people who:

- Have no known history of COVID-19 infection (and therefore are unlikely to have protection from hybrid immunity),

- Have medical comorbidities that increase their risk of severe COVID-19, or disability with significant or complex health needs, or

- Reside in a residential aged care facility.

Learn more about ATAGI advice here

Understanding risk

Mortality rates of people with disability have decreased significantly over the course of each successive Omicron wave of COVID-19. Nonetheless, the mortality rate of people with disability is higher than that of the general population.

The higher mortality rate is likely due to the increased prevalence of complex underlying health conditions among people with disability, compared to the general population. It reinforces the importance for people with disability, particularly those with complex health conditions, to stay up to date with their COVID-19 vaccination[1].

Understanding the risk COVID-19 poses can help people make informed decisions.

People with disability have a greater risk of serious illness from COVID-19 if they have:

- an existing chronic condition
- a weakened immune system
- difficulty maintaining physical distancing because of impracticality
- difficulty maintaining hygiene measures, such as wearing a face mask.

More information on groups at higher risk from COVID-19 can be found here.

ATAGI's clinical guidance on medical risk factors for severe disease is **here**.

Immunocompromised

People who are immunocompromised are more likely to get sick and have a more severe illness from COVID-19 or be sick for a longer period. People can be immunocompromised either due to a medical condition or from taking medication that suppresses the immune system.

A shared decision making guide for people with immunocompromise can be found here.

COVID-19 oral treatments

Two COVID-19 oral antiviral treatments molnupiravir (Lagevrio®) and nirmatrelvir and ritonavir (Paxlovid®) are listed on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) for the treatment of COVID-19.

Eligible individuals who test positive to COVID-19 can access these medicines from their local community pharmacy on a prescription from a medical practitioner or an authorised nurse practitioner, in accordance with the PBS requirements.

Timing is critical when taking oral antiviral treatments. They are most effective when started as soon as possible, and must be started within **5 days** of symptoms starting or testing positive for COVID-19. People who are eligible for COVID-19 treatments, should talk to their doctor or Nurse Practitioner before they get sick to discuss if a COVID-19 treatment will be right for them and help ensure quick they have access to treatment if needed.

More information about COVID-19 treatments for people with disability can be found in the Information sheet for people with disability.

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[1] Lessons from the fourth Omicron COVID-19 wave

Vaccination access

How providers can support COVID-19 vaccination

The support of disability service providers, and disability workers, is crucial in ensuring people with disability have the information they need to make an informed choice about COVID-19 vaccination.

All National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) providers have a responsibility to support NDIS participants to access timely vaccination, should the participant decide to be vaccinated.

Providers can:

- Ensure people with disability have the facts about COVID-19 and vaccination, so they can make an informed choice.

- Ask the local Primary Health Network (PHN) for help finding suitable vaccine providers, including on-site vaccinations if needed.

- Support your staff to get vaccinated as well.

- Arrange an on-site visit from a COVID-19 vaccination service if you can't access any other vaccination options. Your local PHN can assist you with this.

- Direct any questions on access to vaccination to the COVID-19 vaccine disability team at the Department of Health and Aged Care via email: DisabilityCovidVaccineDelivery@Health.gov.au

Informed consent

Prior to vaccine administration, NDIS participants (or a person who is lawfully able to make decisions on their behalf) must give informed consent, with any necessary support to do so.

Information on what to do if a substitute decision maker says no to COVID-19 vaccination is available on the Department of Health and Aged Care website.

Everyone has the right to decide to be vaccinated, including people with disability.

Under the NDIS Code of Conduct, all NDIS providers and workers have an obligation to deliver supports and services in a safe manner. NDIS providers and workers also have an obligation to act with respect for individual rights to freedom of expression, self-determination, and decision-making in accordance with relevant laws and conventions.

Consent forms may assist with the administration of the consent process. The Department of Health and Aged Care has designed a sample template.

Outbreak prevention, planning and management

For individuals

It is recommended that people with disability develop their own personal plan of what to do in an emergency, including during a COVID-19 infection. An emergency plan covers how a person's support needs will be managed in an emergency.

This plan should outline the steps people with disability, their providers and carers will take together in the event of a COVID-19 diagnosis to ensure they continue to receive the support they need.

Collaborating 4 Inclusion has worked with the Department of Health and Aged Care to develop a range of resources to help people with disability, and their families and carers, tailor a plan specific to their needs.

It is important that disability providers work with people with disability to establish a plan and keep it up to date.

Visit Collaborating 4 Inclusion for further information.

For providers

The Communicable Diseases Network Australia has published National Guidelines for the Prevention, Control and Public Health Management of Outbreaks of Acute Respiratory Infection (including COVID-19 and Influenza) in Disability Residential Services. These guidelines can help providers of disability residential services apply a risk-based approach to the prevention, identification, and management of acute respiratory infection outbreaks.

The NDIS Commission website provides information and guidance to help NDIS providers to meet their obligations under the NDIS Act in relation to COVID-19 and managing outbreaks.

The NDIS Practice Standards and Quality Indicators provides further guidance for providers for meeting obligations for maintaining continuity of safe, quality supports for NDIS participants, including specific guidance for emergency and disaster management.

Protecting workers

A disability support worker's risk of exposure will depend on factors including the work setting, the number of people being provided services, and the spread of COVID-19 in the community.

Employers should have specific policies and procedures related to COVID-19, and everyone should practice everyday prevention actions when working with people with disability including observing COVID-safe behaviours. Workers are encouraged to use remain up to date with COVID-19 vaccinations and use appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to reduce the rate of infection.

Workers who provide close personal disability care in high-risk settings such as disability care services, should not attend work:

- for 7 days after testing positive for COVID-19
- while they have symptoms.

Workers are encouraged to wear a mask in the company of vulnerable people when returning to work after an infection.

NDIS providers that make a payment to disability workers who deliver close personal support to NDIS participants, have lost hours due to a COVID-19 infection and have insufficient or no sick leave, may be eligible for reimbursement. Learn more at dss.gov.au/covidleavegrant.

Disability service providers and support workers must follow the rules that apply to their location. Monitor and follow advice of your local health department.

Personal Protective Equipment

PPE protects the wearer from infection and helps stop the spread of COVID-19.

The [Department of Health and Aged Care](#) has information available to help you find out who should use PPE and how to use it.

For further information on supports available through the NDIS take a look at

COVID-safe behaviours

COVID-safe behaviours help protect you and those around you from COVID-19. You can be COVID-safe by wearing a mask, physical distancing and practicing good hand and respiratory hygiene.

At any time, you can choose to wear a mask in public areas to help protect your health.

When cases are increasing, it is recommended that everyone who can wears a mask in crowded indoor areas such as public transport, lifts, and other high traffic areas.

You should stay at home if you are feeling unwell and until your symptoms resolve.

Try and maximise your time spent in well-ventilated spaces.

More information on COVID-safe behaviours can be found at Living with COVID-19 | Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care.

COVID-19 and ventilation

Good ventilation remains an important consideration for indoor disability settings.

The Australian Health Principal Protection Committee advises that increased airflow may limit the spread of COVID-19 in indoor environments, particularly in crowded, inadequately ventilated spaces where infected persons may spend time with others.

The World Health Organisation advises that the risk of COVID-19 spreading indoors may be reduced through well-designed, maintained and operational ventilation systems. Increased use of natural ventilation (such as enabling airflow through open windows) may provide the same benefits. Practical advice on how to improve indoor ventilation can be found on the Victorian Government website.

Additional information can be found on the Ventilation factsheet | Disability Gateway.

The National Disability Insurance Agency has a range of COVID-19 measures for NDIS participants and providers. This includes the ability for eligible participants to purchase a portable air purifier through their existing NDIS plan funding to assist in improving air quality in key living areas and help to ensure continuity of supports. For more information see Flexible low cost AT for support continuity | NDIS.

COVID-19 and Mental Health

The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, physical distancing and isolation may cause feelings of anxiousness, stress and worry.

Mental health support is available for all Australians.

The following services are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, anywhere in Australia:

- Lifeline - 13 11 14
- Beyond Blue - 1300 22 4636
- Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS National) - 131 450
- Kids helpline - 1800 55 1800
- Suicide Call Back Service – 1300 659 467

Visit the Department of Health and Aged Care website to learn more about mental health support services available.

You can also access tips to help mental health from the Council for Intellectual Disability.

Additional communication resources

For First Nations peoples

The Department of Health and Aged Care has a collection of COVID-19 vaccines communication materials, including social media content, posters and videos, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations.

For Australians from CALD backgrounds

The Department of Health and Aged Care has a range of translated products, in addition to content in over 50 languages.

A range of vaccination videos have been produced in a wide range of languages, available on the YouTube channel for the Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care.

Department of Health and Aged Care YouTube

You can access useful information from the official YouTube channel for the Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care.

Here are a few useful videos:

- COVID-19 Booster advice for high risk communities
- COVID-19 Reminder – Dr Michael Kidd
- COVID-19 Booster Advice
- COVID-19 Testing

Department of Health and Aged Care Facebook

The Department of Health and Aged Care regularly posts updates on its official Facebook site, including specific posts for people with disability and those who care for them.

Facts about COVID-19 – is it true?

With so much information available, it can be hard to get the facts. The Australian Department of Health and Aged Care has provided facts on COVID-19 vaccines.

Here are some common myths and the facts about COVID-19.

Children and teenagers

- Children don't need to be vaccinated against COVID-19.
- Is my child eligible for a COVID-19 2023 booster?
- Do children 5-11 years only need one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine?
- Do adults and children who have had COVID-19 need to get vaccinated?
- Do kids need to get vaccinated if they don't get severely ill from COVID-19?

COVID-19 vaccination

- [How long will the COVID-19 vaccine last once I have had two doses?](#)
- [Do I have to wait between getting the Influenza (flu) and COVID-19 vaccine?](#)
- [Were COVID-19 vaccines developed too quickly to be safe?](#)
- [Were COVID-19 vaccines rushed through approvals or given emergency use authorisations in Australia?](#)

COVID-19 vaccination side effects

- [Are the side effects of the vaccine just as bad as having COVID-19?](#)
- [COVID-19 vaccines cause autism?](#)
- [Are COVID-19 vaccines not effective?](#)
- [Does injecting into the bloodstream instead of muscle cause TTS or myocarditis?](#)
- [Do COVID-19 vaccines contain a microchip or any kind of tracking technology?](#)
- [Can COVID-19 vaccines alter my DNA?](#)
- [Do COVID-19 vaccines cause autoimmune diseases?](#)
- [Do COVID-19 vaccines cause infertility?](#)

COVID-19 virus

- [Hot weather kills the COVID-19 virus](#)

Additional resources

The Department of Health and Aged Care has a range of resources to help spread the message on the importance of vaccination.

- [COVID-19 Vaccination Easy Read Resources](#)
- [COVID-19 Easy Read Resources](#)
- [COVID-19 vaccination – Disability provider alerts | Australian Government Department of Health](#)
- [Information for disability service providers about COVID-19 vaccines | Australian Government Department of Health](#)
- [Living with COVID-19 | Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care](#)

Maintaining a safe workplace – Mental Health

- [Mental Health | Safe Work Australia (swa.gov.au)](#)
- [Supporting you through the Coronavirus pandemic - Beyond Blue](#)
- [Disability discrimination | Australian Human Rights Commission](#)

Maintaining a safe workplace – exposure to COVID-19

- NDIS Commission coronavirus (COVID-19) information | NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission
- Duties under WHS laws | Safe Work Australia

Infection Prevention and Control

- Infection Prevention Control
- National Guidelines for the Prevention, Control and Public Health Management of Outbreaks of Acute Respiratory Infection (including COVID-19 and Influenza) in Disability Residential Services
- Maintaining safe and effective infection control in disability settings
- HLTSS00083 - Infection Prevention and Control Skill Set
- Infection Prevention and Control eLearning Modules | Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care