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| Vaccination requirements for healthcare workers |
| Frequently asked questions  |
| OFFICIAL |

Healthcare workers are more likely to be exposed to, acquire and transmit vaccine-preventable diseases such as influenza, measles, rubella and pertussis.

This document answers some frequently asked questions relating to vaccination requirements for healthcare workers, including information about mandatory influenza vaccination requirements.

#### What information is available regarding healthcare worker vaccination recommendations?

The Australian Immunisation Handbook provides information on vaccination for people at occupational risk, including recommendations for healthcare workers. <<https://immunisationhandbook.health.gov.au/contents/vaccination-for-special-risk-groups/vaccination-for-people-at-occupational-risk#summary>>

#### Why do healthcare workers need to be vaccinated?

As an occupational group, healthcare workers are at increased risk of vaccine-preventable disease if not vaccinated. Additionally, if not vaccinated, healthcare workers may pose an increased risk of disease transmission to other workers and patients, particularly those who are vulnerable because of age, pregnancy, immunosuppression or acute or chronic disease.

#### Are there any mandatory vaccination requirements in Victoria?

Secretary and Ministerial Directions are in place requiring some healthcare workers to be vaccinated annually against seasonal influenza. The mandatory requirement is based on the setting where a healthcare worker is employed, and the role they perform.

#### Which settings does the influenza vaccination requirements apply to?

The requirement for vaccination applies to healthcare workers in:

* public health services
* public hospitals
* denominational hospitals
* private hospitals and day procedure centres
* ambulance services
* patient transport services that are engaged by a health service or Ambulance Victoria
* residential aged care services operated by a public hospital, public health service or denominational hospital
* Forensicare

The annual influenza vaccination requirement applies to current and prospective employees (including contractors, locums and agency workers) and visiting medical officers (VMOs).

#### Does everyone working in a health service need to be vaccinated against influenza? What about staff that never see patients?

The requirement for influenza vaccination applies only to healthcare workers whose role requires them to have direct physical contact with patients, clients, deceased persons or body parts, blood, body substances, infectious material or surfaces or equipment that might contain any of the aforementioned, or where they are required to work in a clinical area where they may be exposed to influenza infection spread by droplets.

All healthcare workers are strongly encouraged to receive the annual influenza vaccine, regardless of their role or where they are employed.

#### What are the requirements for staff who have contraindications to the influenza vaccine?

Healthcare workers who are unable to be vaccinated due to medical contraindications to vaccination must demonstrate evidence of this to their employer. The healthcare service should undertake a review of the role and duties of workers who cannot be vaccinated due to medical contraindications to ensure their health and safety at work.

Healthcare workers that are unable to be vaccinated due to a medical contraindication to any vaccine will not have their employment terminated, nor can an employer discriminate against a current or prospective employee who has a medical contraindication to vaccination.

#### What is the legislative framework for the mandatory influenza vaccination requirement?

Sections 42 and 105A of the *Health Services Act 1988* (Vic) and section 10(4) of the *Ambulance Services Act* *1986* (Vic) enable the Secretary of the Department of Health to direct health and ambulance services to require vaccination against selected vaccine-preventable diseases to protect the health and safety of healthcare workers and patients.

On 8 April 2022, Secretary Directions were introduced requiring healthcare workers to be vaccinated against seasonal influenza by 15 August each year.

The Mental Health Act 2014 allows the Minister for Mental Health to issue a written direction on any matter that the Minister is satisfied is necessary, including requiring vaccinations for healthcare workers. On 6 June 2022 Ministerial Directions were introduced requiring Forensicare employees to be vaccinated against seasonal influenza by 15 August each year.

#### Can hospitals / health services introduce their own vaccination policies, above and beyond the Secretary Directions?

Yes. Should any health service determine that it is appropriate for their circumstances to introduce vaccination requirements through their own workplace policies, they should ensure that these requirements are informed by an assessment of risk, and meet consultation obligations with employees and applicable representatives under occupational health and safety legislation and any applicable industrial instrument/s.

#### Do students and volunteers require vaccination?

Students and volunteers are not subject to Secretary Directions; however, a health service may reasonably require students and/or volunteers to meet vaccination requirements before commencing roles or placements within the setting at their discretion.

#### What evidence of vaccination is required?

All current and prospective healthcare workers must demonstrate evidence of their influenza vaccination or contraindication to vaccination to their employer. The record of immunisation must be a current digital or printed Immunisation History Statement from the Australian Immunisation Register (AIR). A contraindication to influenza vaccination must be a letter from a medical practitioner.

#### Can healthcare workers choose not to be vaccinated for influenza?

Prospective employees for roles where vaccination requirements apply may not be employed by a healthcare setting if they refuse to comply with the requirements for non-medical reasons.

When a current healthcare worker does not comply with vaccination requirements, they should talk to their employer to determine if options such as working from home, obtaining access to accrued annual leave, using any long service leave entitlements, or accessing unpaid leave for a specified or indefinite period are possible (at the employer’s discretion).

An employer may choose to redeploy staff who refuse to be vaccinated against influenza to areas of higher to lower risk (for patients) or require additional personal protective equipment (PPE).

Workers who are not compliant with vaccination requirements may be allowed to work in an emergency or extraordinary circumstance at the discretion of their employer.

#### Where can healthcare workers access vaccination?

Many health services offer an employee influenza vaccination program. The influenza vaccinee is also available through general practice, community pharmacies and some local council immunisation services.

#### Is COVID-19 vaccination required for healthcare workers?

On 4 October 2024, Secretary Directions mandating COVID-19 vaccination for healthcare workers were revoked.

Victorian healthcare workers are now strongly recommended to remain up to date with their COVID-19 vaccinations as per Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) advice and the [Australian Immunisation Handbook](https://immunisationhandbook.health.gov.au/contents/vaccine-preventable-diseases/covid-19).

The decision to revoke the COVID-19 vaccine Secretary Directions, and replace them with a strong recommendation to remain up to date, reflects the evolving COVID-19 epidemiologic situation in Victoria, emerging evidence on the burden of COVID-19 disease and advice and guidance from ATAGI on COVID-19 vaccination*.*

**Can healthcare workers choose not to be vaccinated against COVID-19?**

Healthcare workers that are new or have not worked in the industry due to failure to meet the COVID-19 vaccination requirements under the COVID-19 vaccine Secretary Directions may be able to apply for a position within an organisation if they comply the health service’s own vaccination requirements (which are determined at a health service level).

#### Where can I find out more information?

Healthcare workers should speak to their current or prospective employer in the first instance to understand their vaccination requirements for their role.

More information including copies of the Secretary Directions and policy guidance for healthcare settings is available at <<https://www.health.vic.gov.au/immunisation/vaccination-for-healthcare-workers> or by emailing immunisation@health.vic.au>.

Other information can be found at:

* [Seasonal influenza vaccine (health.vic.gov.au)](https://www.health.vic.gov.au/immunisation/seasonal-influenza-vaccine) <https://www.health.vic.gov.au/immunisation/seasonal-influenza-vaccine>
* [Better Health Channel – Flu (influenza) – immunisation](https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/flu-influenza-immunisation) <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/flu-influenza-immunisation>
* [Australian Immunisation Handbook - influenza](https://immunisationhandbook.health.gov.au/vaccine-preventable-diseases/influenza-flu) <https://immunisationhandbook.health.gov.au/contents/vaccine-preventable-diseases/influenza-flu>
* [Australian Immunisation Handbook - vaccination for people at occupational risk](https://immunisationhandbook.health.gov.au/contents/vaccination-for-special-risk-groups/vaccination-for-people-at-occupational-risk) <https://immunisationhandbook.health.gov.au/contents/vaccination-for-special-risk-groups/vaccination-for-people-at-occupational-risk>
* Australian Immunisation Handbook - [COVID-19](https://immunisationhandbook.health.gov.au/contents/vaccine-preventable-diseases/covid-19) <https://immunisationhandbook.health.gov.au/contents/vaccine-preventable-diseases/covid-19>
* [Australian Government - Immunisations for health care workers](https://www.health.gov.au/topics/immunisation/immunisation-information-for-health-professionals/immunisations-for-health-care-workers) <https://www.health.gov.au/topics/immunisation/immunisation-information-for-health-professionals/immunisations-for-health-care-workers>

To receive this document in another format, pho or email the Immunisation Programt <immunisation@health.vic.gov.au>.

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