



Moving Forward with COVID-19 Risk Mitigation Webinar (Held 24 November 2022)

Question and Answer Summary

Updated 3rd December 2022

The information below is current as of 3rd of December. Disability providers are advised to be aware of any local changes to COVID-19 recommendations.

COVID-19 booster information

Are boosters available for people under 18yrs?

[COVID-19 booster vaccine advice | Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care](#)

3rd dose of COVID-19 vaccination is currently available to:

- everyone for all 16 yrs.+
- **Or 16Yrs and over for those with co-morbidities**

4th dose of COVID-19 vaccination is currently available to:

- Anyone 50yrs+
- Or 30yrs to49yrs individuals with co-morbidities'
- Recommendation for 5-15 booster only for high-risk immune compromised etc. – not all children

Under 5yrs COVID-19 vaccination

- Program only for at risk groups

Refer to poster on the vaccine site [ATAGI recommended COVID-19 doses and vaccines | Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care](#)

Booster vaccine options and 5th dose

What about other doses of the COVID-19 vaccination?

Is the 4th dose required and what about future doses such as a 5th?

The current Advice from ATAGI is for all people to access the dose of COVID vaccination they are eligible to receive – to remain fully protected.

Vaccination reduces the risk of serious illness, hospitalization and death, however you can still, be infected by COVID-19 when full vaccinated, especially with current Variants.

Health authorities recommend accessing whatever COVID-19 vaccine is readily available. New bivalent vaccines are encouraged where these are available but with increasing community transmission the recommendation is do not wait for a supply of a new vaccine if another one is available applicable to your needs.

Atagi is not recommending a 5th dose of vaccination at this stage but will be reviewing the clinical needs and updated guidance will be released early in 2023. Further vaccination doses for COVID-19 are expected to be introduced as the pandemic is ongoing and need for protection against this virus will continue.

Effectiveness of RATS with current COVID-19 variants

Are RAT kits still effective to capture current variant??

The TGA's performance requirements for COVID-19 self-tests are internationally aligned with technical specifications published by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the European Commission. For rapid antigen tests, this includes a clinical sensitivity of at least 80% (for specimens collected within 7 days of symptom onset) and a clinical specificity of at least 98%.

Australian Health authorities support the use of TGA (Therapeutic Goods Administration) approved Rapid Antigen Tests has a list of the approved RATs and includes the level of sensitivity in identifying COVID-19 details can be found at [COVID-19 rapid antigen self-tests that are approved in Australia | Therapeutic Goods Administration \(TGA\)](#)

COVID-19 infection and retesting

Does the retesting after COVID-19 remain at 3 months?

Three months refers to the time between testing positive for COVID-19 and receiving a COVID-19 vaccination. Retesting for COVID-19 after a positive RAT or PCR test result varies slightly by state or territory.

Refer to specific details and links below:

ACT: [Home - COVID-19 \(act.gov.au\)](#)

Retest five weeks after positive result may be new infection

NSW: [Testing positive to COVID-19 and managing COVID-19 safely at home | NSW Government](#)

New symptoms after 4 weeks retest in NSW or if exposed to COVID-1+ person

NT: [Long COVID or post-COVID-19 conditions | NT Health - COVID-19](#)

Retest after 28 days if you have recovered and experiencing new symptoms

QLD: [After having COVID-19 | Health and wellbeing | Queensland Government \(www.qld.gov.au\)](#)

Retest after 35 days

SA: [Long COVID | SA Health](#)

Retest after 28 days

TAS: [Recovery from COVID-19 | Coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\)](#)

Retest after five weeks or more

VIC: [Checklist for COVID cases | Coronavirus Victoria](#)

Retest after 4 weeks if new symptoms

WA: [COVID-19 Coronavirus: Managing COVID-19 in WA \(www.wa.gov.au\)](#)

Retest after 35 days

COVID-19 Isolation and mask wearing

The need for ongoing COVID-19 safe planning to include risk management assessment and Organisational decisions related to worker isolation when testing positive to COVID-19, mask wearing requirements or recommendations and considerations for these decisions where no State or Territory requirements exist.

Refer to the presentation slides and webinar recording.

Please also refer to the relevant guidance for your State or Territory.

ACT: [Information for people who test positive for COVID-19 - COVID-19 \(act.gov.au\)](https://www.act.gov.au/health/2020/05/28/information-for-people-who-test-positive-for-covid-19)

NSW: [Testing positive to COVID-19 and managing COVID-19 safely at home | NSW Government](https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/COVID-19/Pages/testing-positve-to-covid-19.aspx)

NT: [If you test positive for COVID-19 | NT Health - COVID-19](https://www.health.nt.gov.au/COVID-19/Pages/if-you-test-positive-for-covid-19.aspx)

QLD: [Guidelines for a person diagnosed with COVID-19 or symptoms of an acute respiratory infection in Queensland | Health and wellbeing | Queensland Government \(www.qld.gov.au\)](https://www.health.qld.gov.au/COVID-19/Pages/guidelines-for-a-person-diagnosed-with-covid-19-or-symptoms-of-an-acute-respiratory-infection-in-queensland.aspx)

SA: [What to do if I test positive | SA Health](https://www.health.sa.gov.au/COVID-19/Pages/what-to-do-if-i-test-positive.aspx)

TAS: [What to do if you test positive to COVID-19 – Five simple steps | Coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\)](https://www.health.tas.gov.au/COVID-19/Pages/what-to-do-if-you-test-positive-to-covid-19.aspx)

VIC: [I'm a COVID case/contact | Coronavirus Victoria](https://www.health.vic.gov.au/COVID-19/Pages/im-a-covid-case-contact.aspx)

WA: [COVID-19 Coronavirus: Managing COVID-19 in WA \(www.wa.gov.au\)](https://www.health.wa.gov.au/COVID-19/Pages/managing-covid-19.aspx)

COVID-19 antivirals

I heard that ATAGI might make antivirals available to all. Is this likely?

Any expanded access to antivirals will be determined by the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee (PBAC). The PBAC bases their decisions on age and clinical risk factors and continually review the clinical needs and update advice accordingly.

Vaccination requirements and employer considerations

** **Note** This topic was discussed in detail in the presentations By Nick Maley, (Partner, Holman Webb Lawyers) and Anna Pannuzzo (Director, WorkPlace PLUS). Please refer to their presentation slides or recording of the webinar for valuable discussion of the issues and checklists.*

Key considerations addressing questions raised have been grouped into themes

Vaccination mandates

What mandates still exist?

No vaccination mandates remain in force across Australia as of 1st Dec 2022

NSW was the final state to remove their public health orders mandating vaccination for workers including aged care and disability. The mandate ceased at the end of 30th November 2022. This aligns the NSW disability sector with all other states and territories where the responsibility for any requirement for a worker COVID-19 vaccination needs to be decided as part of an organisation risk assessment strategy.

Note – as this removal of the NSW mandate occurred after the NDS *Moving Forward with COVID-19 Risk Mitigation* webinar all slides referring to the NSW mandate no longer apply.

[Vaccination requirements for workers | NSW Government](#)

A decision to require a COVID-19 vaccination by disability workers is the responsibility of the employer and any risk assessment process to determine whether or not vaccination will be required needs to be carried in consultation with workers. This must also take into consideration the levels of risk associated all worker roles with the Fair Work Australia guidance on Tiers 1-4 recommended by session presenters.

Fair Work Australia guidance

To determine potential level of risk associated with COVID-19 infection for workers the Fair Work Ombudsman guidance categorizes work activities and roles in relation to interaction with the public into four groups (tiers).

[COVID-19 vaccinations: workplace rights & obligations - Fair Work Ombudsman](#)

Will further consultation with workers be needed if a COVID-19 vaccination requirement has been in place already because of pandemic mandates. Can we continue with this requirement that is in place?

Consultation regarding any requirement that may be introduced needs to occur with staff regardless of any previously existing mandates. Employers need to communicate with workers about any changes with mandates or requirements associated with their position, current risk mitigation needs, and the actions proposed.

Refer to presentation slides for key consultation needs and recommendations

Disability COVID-19 and existing guidance

NDIS

Registered providers are required to have appropriate risk mechanisms in place to manage any emergency and disasters that includes COVID-19.

[National Disability Insurance Scheme \(Provider Registration and Practice Standards\) Amendment \(2021 Measures No. 1\) Rules 2021 \(legislation.gov.au\)](#)

9 At the end of Part 3 of Schedule 1 (addition)

16A Emergency and disaster management

Emergency and disaster management includes planning that:

- (a) ensures that the risks to the health, safety and wellbeing of participants that may arise in an emergency or disaster are considered and mitigated;
and
- (b) ensures the continuity of supports critical to the health, safety and wellbeing of participants in an emergency or disaster.

Australian Government Health Protection Principal Committee (8 Sept 2022)

The Australian Government Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) identifies the need for a proportionate approach to isolation for those with COVID-19 infections at this stage of the pandemic. AHPPC further notes that while balancing a proportionate approach to isolation for all Australians, it is important to ensure the continued protection of those most vulnerable to severe illness from COVID-19 especially in settings where there is increased risk of outbreaks occurring.

AHPPC continues to reiterate the importance of other risk mitigating strategies to reduce the impact of COVID-19 on individuals and the community. This includes the following:

- Ensure you are up to date with recommended vaccinations.
- Stay home if you are unwell and get tested.
- Speak to your healthcare professional about eligibility for treatments should you become unwell with COVID-19.
- Consider wearing a mask when outside your home and especially when in crowded, indoor environments such as public transport.
- Keep indoor spaces well ventilated.
- Practise good respiratory and hand hygiene.

[Australian Health Protection Principal Committee \(AHPPC\) | Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care](#)

Work Health and Safety obligations

Session presenters identified work health and safety legislation associated with known risks as the basis for assessment of relevant requirements to protect the safety of workers and people with disabilities,

Refer to presentation slides for key consultation needs and recommendations

State or Territory links have been included for your reference.

Australia: [Welcome | Safe Work Australia](#)

ACT: [Home - WorkSafe ACT](#)

NSW: [Home | SafeWork NSW](#)

NT: [Home | NT WorkSafe](#)

QLD: [Home | WorkSafe.qld.gov.au](#)

SA: [Workers | SafeWork SA](#)

TAS: [WorkSafe Tasmania](#)

VIC: [Home page | WorkSafe Victoria](#)

WA: [WorkSafe | Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety
\(commerce.wa.gov.au\)](#)

Risk mitigation and workers or participants who are not vaccinated against COVID-19

What about the vaccination status of participants?

What can we do about mitigating that risk?

The NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission identified during the height of the pandemic unvaccinated participants could not be denied access to services because of personal choice regarding vaccination, nor could any person who was medically exempt from COVID-19 vaccination. There were exceptions where a State or Territory pandemic order was in place requiring vaccination to enter a venue/specific activity unless medically exempt.

We are losing workers due to vaccination requirements, why not leave to personal choice?

Discussion identified there are many requirements for various working roles that we expect of existing or new workers. COVID-19 related requirements may need to be added as employers shift from deferring to government orders to the organisation responsibility for managing this new known risk that will be ongoing and may increase in intensity again in the future. All presenters provided recommendations for COVID-19 Safe Plans highlighting these need to be continually reviewed and updated for immediate and future implementation.

It was noted that despite an employer completing a thorough consultation and risk assessment process it may still result in some workers refusing to comply with any requirement to maintain their eligible dose of COVID-19 vaccination. A strategy for managing this would be necessary.

Refer to the presentation slides and webinar recording.

Infection prevention and control (IPC)

Cleaning

What evidence is there for the effectiveness of cleaning methods and products against COVID-19?

The Department of Health has updated environmental cleaning and disinfection guidelines these reiterate the effectiveness of correct infection control cleaning practices to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission.

<https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-environmental-cleaning-and-disinfection-principles-for-health-and-residential-care-facilities>

The Australian Government Therapeutic Goods Association (TGA) determines whether a supplier can be permitted to claim that a disinfectant has an effect against any virus before being used in consumer advertising (including on the label). In response to the COVID-19 pandemic the TGA has a list [permitted SARS-CoV-2 and COVID-19 virus claims](#). The following list is comprised of disinfectant products that have been entered into the ARTG with specific claims against SARS-Cov-2 (COVID 19) or COVID-19 on the product label.

[Disinfectants for use against COVID-19 in the ARTG for legal supply in Australia | Therapeutic Goods Administration \(TGA\)](#)

Note: This is a specific area of infection control knowledge and practice that was identified by disability sector workers regarding the need to address common errors and provide a more detailed understanding of the steps involved. Additional content has been added to address this need in the NDS & HEC online infection control course, (Maintaining safe and effective infection control in disability settings) launched during the webinar. See details and link in section on training below.

Worker knowledge and skill training options

[Maintaining safe and effective infection control in disability settings \(nds.org.au\)](https://nds.org.au)

The new NDS and Health Education Collaborative online course, launched as part of the webinar, offers key benefits to mitigate against infection risks and transmission in the current and emerging needs context.

- Developed with input from over 300+ plus disability workers and management during COVID
- Reviewed by representatives of the Australian Government DSS Portfolio response COVID-19 Taskforce with their additional recommendations also included
- Covers essential knowledge and skills needed for the change
- Addresses COVID risk management along with other common infectious conditions for broad application
- Uses range of learning formats to be accessible for workers with little or no health literacy background

This course provides a deeper dive into the infection control knowledge needed by disability workers and specifically those who are direct care focussed and may not have any qualifications that include infection control taking into consideration the risk management responsibilities that have increased since the pandemic environment.

The components included have been informed by feedback from sector workers who identified key errors and areas where increased attention would be. This course complements existing online e-learning programs that are available on the NDS Learning and development platform and government departments.

For more details including the costs please use the link above and refer to the slides includes in the presentation pack.

[National Disability Services \(nds.org.au\)](https://www.nds.org.au) has a suite of e-learning resources including infection control that complement the new program listed above.

Examples of other options available online

Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care

[COVID-19 infection control training | Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care](#)

Department of Health Victoria and VICNESS

[VICNISS - Infection Prevention and Control eLearning Modules](#)