

Ministers

Department of Health and Aged Care

Expanded eligibility for fourth COVID-19 vaccine dose

An additional 7.4 million people will now be eligible to receive a fourth COVID-19 vaccine dose from next week after the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) updated its recommendations.

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An additional 7.4 million people will now be eligible to receive a fourth COVID-19 vaccine dose from next week after the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) updated its recommendations.

This will help provide additional protection from severe disease against the emerging surge of Omicron subvariant infections and reduce the burden on Australian hospitals and the health care system in coming months.

The Australian Government has accepted the recommendations of the ATAGI vaccine experts and will open the fourth dose to those newly eligible from Monday, 11 July.

ATAGI specifically recommended that people aged 50 to 64 years should have their fourth dose, while people aged 30 to 49 years may choose to have a fourth shot.

ATAGI reiterated that people who had already been eligible for the fourth dose, including those aged 65 years and over, remain at higher risk of severe disease and death from COVID-19.

As at 7 July 2022, 60 per cent of people aged 65 years and over have had their fourth dose. People who haven't already received it are strongly encouraged to have it as soon as possible.

ATAGI also recommended the interval between vaccine doses, or prior infection (whichever comes later), be reduced from four months to three months to provide earlier additional protection.

ATAGI did not support making the fourth dose available to healthy adults under the age of 30 years as it was not clear whether the benefits outweighed the risks in this population group.

Almost 14 million people in Australia aged 16 and over have received three or more doses of COVID-19 vaccine.

People aged 50 years and over who haven't yet had a fourth vaccine are encouraged to make an appointment as soon as possible to ensure they are up to date with their vaccination and have the greatest protection possible against COVID-19.

ATAGI continues to recommend that people in eligible at-risk population groups, including those who are severely immunocompromised (for these people, it will be a fifth dose) or who have underlying medical conditions, receive their fourth dose.

ATAGI has noted the number of people in Australia ill from respiratory virus infections, including from COVID-19, has increased over the past few months, placing an increased strain on the Australian health care system, particularly hospitals.

A surge in cases of COVID-19 BA.4 and BA.5 subvariants is a contributing factor and is expected to worsen in coming months.

Increasing the uptake of fourth doses in the most at-risk population groups during this time is anticipated to play a limited, but important, role in reducing the risk to individuals of severe outcomes while taking pressure off Australia's health care system.

ATAGI has expressed concern that the take up of the first booster dose, and the fourth dose among those who had already been eligible, has not been high enough and emphasises the importance of vaccination in preventing severe disease and death during this time, particularly in older adults and people aged 16 years and older with a medical condition or disability.

QUOTES FOR ATTRIBUTION TO MINISTER BUTLER

"We are in the early stages of a third Omicron wave and our Government is absolutely committed to making sure as many people as possible are protected with the vaccine.

"My message to everyone living in Australia aged 50 and over is to make sure you have the greatest protection against COVID-19 by having a fourth dose as soon as possible. If you are aged 30 to 49 and you want that extra protection, you can choose to get a fourth dose.

"The vaccine experts on the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation have recommended it – and the Government has accepted this advice.

"My other message is that oral antiviral treatments can be life-saving for older people or people with chronic health conditions who are at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19.

"It is vital a person starts the five-day oral treatment course as soon as possible after symptoms first appear.

"If you are at higher risk of severe illness, plan ahead. Speak to your doctor now about oral antiviral treatment for COVID-19."

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