16 June 2022 - Novavax vaccine shelf-life extension | Update accessibility details in VCF Connect | Managing vaccines during a power failure | Reporting of COVID and flu vaccinations in AIR | Ensure batch numbers accurately reported in AIR

Dear Service Provider,

This email provides information from the National COVID Vaccine Taskforce (the Taskforce) about a range of matters relevant to participating pharmacies in the COVID-19 Vaccination in Community Pharmacy Program (CVCP), as follows:

- Novavax vaccine shelf-life extension
- Update accessibility details in VCF Connect
- Managing vaccines during a power failure
- Reporting of COVID and flu vaccinations in AIR
- Ensure batch numbers accurately reported in AIR.

Novavax vaccine shelf-life extension

The Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) has approved a shelf-life extension of Novavax (Nuvaxovid) from 6 months to 9 months from manufacture date, provided that approved storage conditions have been maintained.

The shelf-life extension applies to **all future batches and the following batch number:**

Batch Number	Current Expiry Date	New Expiry Date
4302MF011	31/7/2022	30/10/2022

Importantly:

- **The packaging associated with the above batches has not been amended to reflect the extended expiry dates.** It is expected that all future batches will have the correct expiry date printed on the packaging and vials
- **Refer to the above table when receiving Novavax (Nuvaxovid) vaccine for the correct expiry date.** The new expiry date of each batch will also be reflected in CVAS when completing delivery acceptance
- **Update the expiry date on any vials you have on site for the above batch to reflect the new expiry date,** provided that approved storage conditions have been maintained.

Contact the Vaccine Operations Centre (VOC) on 1800 318 208 or via COVID19VaccineOperationsCentre@health.gov.au if you have any questions.

Update accessibility details in VCF Connect

The Vaccine Clinic Finder (VCF) has expanded its support for people with accessibility needs.

Pharmacies are strongly encouraged to **update their accessibility information in VCF Connect** to better support people looking for information about your services online.

If you have not already done so, **please login to VCF Connect and update accessibility features for each Service Name (vaccine).**

These are:

- Wheelchair accessible
- No Medicare card needed
- No appointment needed (whether you accept walk ins)
- Low sensory space available (available in VCF Connect from 16 June)
- Languages other than English spoken by staff at your site (available in VCF Connect from 16 June).

Importantly:

- **Add any COVID vaccines offered at your pharmacy**
- **Ensure your booking provider is correct for each service.** It is a requirement of the program that all COVID vaccines administered at your pharmacy are published on the Vaccine Clinic Finder.

The Taskforce is calling pharmacies to help update their information on VCF Connect, including the information listed above.

If you have any questions about using VCF Connect, please contact the VCF Connect helpline on 1800 316 375 or email CV19.products@health.gov.au.

Managing vaccines during a power failure

Power failures may occur for many reasons including weather and network events. **Now is a good time to check and review your *Vaccine Back-up Management Plan.***

All staff involved in the monitoring or administration of COVID-19 vaccines should practice implementing this plan, including:

- **Ensuring suitable equipment is available and regularly checked,** including temperature monitoring equipment, coolers, ice/gel packs and insulating material
- **Practicing packing vaccines into alternative storage**
- **Knowing where and how to move vaccines to an alternate monitored vaccine fridge.**

Importantly:

- Always refer to the *Strive for 5* Department of Health (2019a) guidelines Section 8 for the recommended best practice if the power goes off during and after business hours.
- All jurisdictional policies and procures must also be followed, such as this Cold Chain Back-up Plan as prepared by the South Australia Health Department.

Pharmacies should ensure the following:

- **The safety, health and wellbeing of staff is the main priority.** Only consider transferring vaccines to alternative vaccine storage if it is safe to do so
- **Take your time to prepare the packing and moving of vaccines.** Although some vaccine fridges may warm above +8°C as quickly as 30 minutes during a power failure, it is also possible for vaccines to freeze in an inappropriately prepared and packed cooler
- **All cold chain breaches of COVID-19 vaccines must be reported immediately** to the Vaccine Operations Centre (VOC) on 1800 318 208
- **Isolate the vaccines within the recommended storage temperature and label vaccines as 'Do not use, do not discard' until further advice is received from the VOC**
- If you have a scheduled COVID-19 vaccine clinic in the near future, inform the VOC to expedite assessment and consider placing the clinic on hold until you receive the outcome of assessment from the VOC.

The VOC has been notified of several cases where vaccines have had to be discarded due to incorrect handling of vaccines following a power outage/fridge malfunction.

> **Case Study**
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> The clinic was notified of power outage at 2am. A staff member attended the clinic soon after and the vaccines were quickly packed without conditioning the ice/gel packs. A data logger was started and placed in the cooler with the vaccines. The staff member returned home with the cooler and went back to sleep. Review of the data logger in the morning showed the battery had gone flat overnight with the last reading showing a drop to a low of 0°C before it stopped recording altogether.
>
> After such prompt action to protect the vaccines, clinic staff were disappointed when advised to discard them. Without constant temperature monitoring the stability of the vaccines could not be assured.
>
> *NOTE: It is important that a cold chain breach (CCB) is recognised and reported promptly when safe to do so. Potentially compromised vaccines are not to be administered prior to receiving the outcome of the CCB assessment from the VOC.*

Reporting of COVID and flu vaccinations in AIR

Pharmacies are reminded of the importance to report COVID and influenza vaccinations in the Australian Immunisation Register (AIR).

Reporting timely, high quality and accurate vaccination information ensures that the AIR maintains a complete and reliable dataset.

- This will enable the monitoring of immunisation coverage and administration
- It also ensures that individuals have a complete record of their vaccinations that can be provided as evidence for education, employment, and/or travel purposes.

Importantly:

- Under the *Australian Immunisation Register Act 2015* it is **mandatory for vaccination providers to report all COVID-19, influenza, and National Immunisation Program vaccinations to the AIR**
- To ensure accurate and complete reporting of vaccination information to the AIR, vaccination providers must provide the following information:
    - Provider information: provider number, name and contact details

- o Personal information of the individual vaccinated: Medicare number (if applicable), name, contact details, date of birth and gender
- o Vaccine information: brand name, dose number and batch number and date of administration.

Ensure batch numbers are accurately reported in AIR

A significant number of AIR records have a batch number **incorrectly** reported.

Pharmacies are asked to make sure they report the correct batch number in AIR.

The Department is aware that some professional services software stores and/or autofills previously entered information which can lead to data entry errors, it is important to correct this information prior to submission.

Kind regards,

Pharmacy Programs Administrator