

24 June 2022 – COVID-19 Taskforce Bulletin

Dear Service Provider,

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

- **Winter vaccine communication campaign**
- **Opportunistic vaccination**
- **COVID-19 and influenza vaccines**
- **COVID-19 vaccine booster doses given outside of the ATAGI recommendations**
- **ATAGI COVID-19 vaccines and doses poster**

Winter Vaccine Communication Campaign

- The Australian Government has [launched](#) a six-week campaign to encourage people to get vaccinated for both COVID-19 and influenza this winter and underlined the availability of antivirals for those most vulnerable to severe effects of COVID-19.
- [See more in Minister Butler's media release](#)

Opportunistic Vaccination

- Pharmacies are encouraged to contact any patients who are eligible for a COVID-19 vaccine booster, those recommended for a winter dose of COVID-19 vaccine or the influenza vaccination (noting also that COVID-19 and influenza vaccines can be co-administered).
- Please continue to utilise the opportunity to vaccinate patients when the opportunity arises.
- While we encourage sites to continue to minimise wastage, if you do have someone who is eligible and requires a COVID-19 vaccine, do not delay, open a vial and vaccinate them.

COVID-19 and Influenza Vaccines

- The Vaccine Operations Centre (VOC) has noted an increase in the number of Vaccination Administration Errors (VAEs) reported involving the administration of **Influenza** and/or **COVID-19 vaccines**.
- Tips for preventing VAEs with Influenza and COVID-19 vaccines:
 - Having clear labelling and storage placements for the different COVID-19 and Influenza vaccines within your vaccine fridge;
 - Separating the children's COVID-19 and Influenza vaccines within the fridge from the adult formulations;
 - Follow your site's vaccine preparation and checking procedures prior to every vaccine administration - refer to "[Don't forget to check](#)" poster;
 - Check the Australian Immunisation Register (AIR) before vaccinating every individual – correct patient, correct vaccine, correct dose, correct dose interval, and
 - Check the vial and syringe to ensure the correct vaccine is being used prior to each administration and confirm with patient.

Case Study

An Influenza vaccine was administered in error to a patient instead of Spikevax (Moderna) vaccine.

- The vaccine provider was administering both Influenza vaccines and COVID-19 vaccines on the same day
- Both COVID-19 vaccines and Influenza vaccines were prepared and stored in the same fridge
- The patient verbally confirmed they were to receive the Spikevax (Moderna) winter booster dose
- It was not until after administering the vaccine to the patient and entering the details into AIR, that the provider realised that they picked up the incorrect vaccine from the fridge

Impact:

- The site will have to contact the patient and disclose the error
- The patient will need to receive another vaccine
- Potential loss of confidence in the vaccine provider
- Risk of harm to the patient with unintended vaccine

How can this be prevented: The vaccinator should check the vaccine before administering to the patient.

COVID-19 vaccine booster doses given outside of the ATAGI recommendations

- The VOC has been contacted and provided advice for several VAEs where sites have administered COVID-19 vaccine booster doses, including winter booster doses, outside of the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) interval recommendations.
- The primary goal of the Australian COVID-19 vaccine program is to minimise the risk of severe disease, including hospitalisation and death, from COVID-19.

The ATAGI advice is as follows:

- **a single booster dose** for all individuals aged 16 years and older, from 3 months after the primary course;
- **a single booster dose** for specified adolescents aged 12-15 years who are at greater risk of severe illness from COVID-19, from 3 months after the primary course; and
- **an additional 'winter' booster dose** for specified individuals aged 16 years and older, who are at highest risk of severe COVID-19, from 4 months after the first booster dose.

The ATAGI [Clinical recommendations for COVID-19 vaccines](#) website should be regularly reviewed to ensure best practice recommendations are followed.

- Reasonable steps must be taken to ensure COVID-19 vaccines are given safely, appropriately, and within the recommended timing interval between doses. This should be routinely done as part of the pre-vaccination screening process (see [Consent form for COVID-19 vaccination](#)) and should involve:
 - Checking the Australian Immunisation Register (AIR) to verify the interval between doses and confirm patient information; and
 - Verifying the patient's eligibility before the administration of a vaccine.

Please note:

- Either of the available mRNA COVID-19 vaccines (Pfizer or Moderna) is preferred for the booster dose in those aged 18 years and above. For those aged 12-17 years, only Pfizer vaccine should be used. These



brands can be used for the booster dose regardless of which vaccine brand was used for the primary course.

- Vaccination is recommended to be deferred for at least 3 months after a confirmed COVID-19 infection for all COVID-19 vaccine doses, including booster doses. This is to enhance protection by further boosting the immune response.
- There is no upper time limit for the administration of a booster dose. However, vaccine effectiveness wanes over time, and timely receipt of boosters is encouraged for people who will particularly benefit.

Case Study One

A booster dose was given to a 52-year-old patient, only 3 weeks after their second primary course dose.

ATAGI Recommendation: A single booster dose is recommended 3 months after the second primary dose. If the first booster dose is given less than two months after the last primary dose, a replacement dose is recommended from 3 months after the invalid dose.

How can this be prevented: The Australian Immunisation Register (AIR) should be checked prior to each vaccination to verify the interval between doses. The ATAGI [Clinical recommendations for COVID-19 vaccines](#) website should be regularly reviewed to ensure best practice recommendations are followed.

Case Study Two

An additional 'winter' booster dose of Spikevax (Moderna) vaccine was given to a 69-year-old patient, 2 months after their first booster dose.

ATAGI Recommendation: The winter booster dose is recommended 4 months after the first booster dose for eligible individuals. If a subsequent booster dose is given earlier than recommended, a replacement dose is generally not recommended, however an individual assessment with a vaccine provider may be required.

How can this be prevented: The Australian Immunisation Register (AIR) should be checked prior to each vaccination to verify the interval between doses. Vaccinators should regularly review the [latest updates](#) on the [Clinical recommendations for COVID-19 vaccines](#) website to ensure they remain up-to-date with current recommendations.



Case Study Three

An additional 'winter' booster dose of **Pfizer 12+ years (purple cap)** vaccine was given to a healthy 43-year-old patient.

- The wrong patient's consent form and Australian Immunisation Register (AIR) information was used to determine the winter booster dose eligibility of the patient.
- The vaccinator did not confirm the patient's details before the administration of the vaccine.

ATAGI Recommendation: Healthy people aged 16 to 64 years, who do not have a risk factor for severe COVID-19, are not recommended to receive an additional 'winter' booster dose at this time. If more doses are administered than recommended by the relevant schedule, monitor for adverse events and as new recommendations for vaccines schedules emerge, consider all doses given, including those in excess of a current schedule.

How can this be prevented: The vaccinator should take reasonable steps to confirm if a person is eligible to receive the vaccine. For example, a detailed conversation between the patient and the vaccinator confirming the patient's name, date of birth, and medical conditions is critical before vaccination to avoid any potential errors from occurring.

If you wish to receive additional advice on a VAE that has occurred at your site, please contact the VOC on 1800 318 208.

ATAGI COVID-19 vaccines and doses poster

- The [ATAGI COVID-19 vaccines and doses poster](#) has been developed to help avoid vaccine administration errors

Kind regards,

Pharmacy Programs Administrator