**QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS**

**Mandatory Vaccinations for Staff Working or Attending Health Care Facilities**

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| **QUESTION** | **ANSWER** |
| **Is there an alternative to being vaccinated like wearing masks?** | No. The Directions is a clear legislative requirement for COVID-19 vaccination. |
| **Is Ruah mandating vaccinations?** | No. The mandate has been made by the WA Government through the legislated Health Worker Directions. Ruah performs work on premises covered by the Directions. This impacts many positions across Ruah and the legislated requirements of people performing that work. |
| **What if I refuse to get vaccinated?** | Ruah makes no judgment on a person’s personal choices. Each person is responsible for those choices.  Ruah is however required to work within the law and applicable legislation and is unable to knowingly allow an employee to breach a legal requirement. |
| **Do I need to get a certain vaccine?** | No. The Direction is for any Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) approved COVID-19 vaccination (e.g. Pfizer and/or Astra Zeneca). |
| **What evidence do I need to provide?**  **and/or**  **What evidence can I provide?** | The following evidence is required:   * written confirmation issued by the Department of Health to the health care worker or health support worker of the COVID-19 vaccination received by them;   or   * a COVID-19 digital vaccination certificate or an immunisation history statement issued to the health care worker or health support worker by Medicare showing the COVID-19 vaccination recorded on the Australian Immunisation Register for that health care worker or health support worker   The approved evidence authority by the Chief Health Officer can be viewed [here](https://www.wa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-09/CHO-form-of-Ev2.pdf). |
| **I don’t know what to do about my vaccine, who should I talk to?** | You should speak with your usual health professional or GP about your vaccination and health considerations. |
| **Does this impact new employees?** | Yes. This impacts any person working in the position that has been identified to interact with the Tiers of the Health Worker Direction.  Ruah’s advertising and new employee information now includes the requirements. |
| **Are there alternative positions I can go to if I do not get vaccinated?** | No, not always. While exemption circumstances will be reviewed case-by-case, and while we will support individual requirements as best we can, an alternative position is not guaranteed. |
| **I’m feeling anxious about the mandate and the requirements, is there any support for me?** | Yes. Ruah has a free and confidential Employee Assistance Program (EAP) for you to access for your support needs. They are qualified counsellors and psychologists that can help you navigate any personal matters. It wouldn’t be appropriate for |
| **When am I considered to be fully vaccinated?** | In order to be considered fully vaccinated for the purpose of the Directions, you must have been administered with two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine.  You will be partially vaccinated if you have been administered with at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine. |
| **I am pregnant, am I exempt?** | While pregnancy is not a restriction to vaccination, medical exemptions must be authorised by a medical practitioner. |
| **What counts as a medical exemption?** | All temporary and permanent medical exemptions must be authorised by a medical practitioner.  Authorised medical practitioners (including General Practitioners) can [notify the Australian Immunisation Register (AIR)](https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/organisations/health-professionals/forms/im011) of an individual who has a vaccine exemption due to medical contraindications or natural immunity, which will be displayed on an individual’s [Immunisation History Statement (IHS)](https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/services/medicare/australian-immunisation-register/what-immunisation-history-statement). |
| **How do I access my Immunisation History Statement?** | People can access their Immunisation History Statement:   * online, by setting up a myGov account and then accessing a Medicare online account; or * through the Express Plus Medicare mobile app; or * by calling the Australian Immunisation Register enquiries line on 1800 653 809 (8am-5pm, Monday to Friday AEST) and asking them to send a copy of the statement. Please allow up to 14 days to receive the statement in the post; or * by asking a GP or vaccination provider to print a copy of your statement for you.   People do not need to have a Medicare card to be able to access their Immunisation History Statement. |
| **Why are some positions in Ruah not required to be vaccinated?** | Careful review has been conducted to map each unique position in Ruah’s organisational structure to the requirements of the Health Worker Directions, and specifically the Tiers based on work requirements.  Ruah strongly encourages all employees, regardless of their role, to be vaccinated. This is important for our workforce and most importantly the vulnerable clients we support in our community. |

**References:**

[WA Department of Health Directions FAQs](https://ww2.health.wa.gov.au/Articles/A_E/Coronavirus/COVID19-vaccination-program/Directions-for-healthcare-and-health-support-workers/FAQ)

[Australian Health Department](https://www.health.gov.au/)

[Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA)](https://www.tga.gov.au/covid-19-vaccines-undergoing-evaluation)

**Last reviewed:** 22 September 2021

**SUPPLEMENTARY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH INFORMATION**

**Health Worker Differences**

***‘Health care workers'*** include those who provide heath, medical, nursing, pathology, pharmaceutical, social work or allied health services to a patient at a health care facility in any capacity; students on placement; and ambulance officers.

This applies to paid and voluntary workers, including agency staff working onsite; administrative staff; ancillary staff including cleaners, laundry staff, gardeners, food preparation services, security officers and maintenance services; providers of lifestyle and social care, eg music or art therapy and people providing commercial activities at health care facilities.

***'Health support workers'*** include those who provide goods or services at a health care facility.

The full Direction can be accessed [here](https://www.wa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-09/Health-Worker-Restrictions-on-Access-Directions.pdf) and is attached to this letter.

**Tier and Timeline Detail**

The following table details the timeline requirements set out by the Department of Health.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Tier** | **Worker Type** | **1st Dose by** | **Fully Vaccinated by** |
| **Tier 1** | Health Care Worker |  | 1 November 2021 |
| Health Support Worker |  |
| **Tier 2** | Health Care Worker | 1 November 2021 | 1 December 2021 |
| Health Support Worker | 1 December 2021 | 1 January 2022 |
| **Tier 3** | Health Care Worker | 1 December 2021 | 1 January 2022 |
| Health Support Worker |

**Tier one** health care facility means:

1. an intensive care unit within a hospital; or
2. a high dependency unit within a hospital; or
3. a respiratory ward within a hospital; or
4. a ward within a high risk regional hospital that has one or more designated respiratory beds; or
5. an emergency department within a hospital; or
6. a COVID clinic; or
7. a COVID-19 vaccination community clinic; or
8. a regional COVID-19 vaccination clinic; or
9. any other facility that is specified to be a tier one health care facility by the Chief Health Officer in writing or any person authorised by him for that purpose.

**Tier two** health care facility means:

1. a hospital, including any ancillary facilities located on the land on which the hospital is located and the land itself; or
2. any other facility that is specified to be a tier two health care facility by the Chief Health Officer in writing or any person authorised by him for that purpose.

**Tier three** health care facility means:

1. a public health service facility, including ancillary facilities and facilities that provide support services, and including any vehicle from which public health services are provided, and any land on which any building comprising a public health service facility is located; or
2. any premises that are occupied by the Department of Health or a health service provider; or
3. any other facility that is specified to be a tier three health care facility by the Chief Health Officer in writing or any person authorised by him for that purpose.

**Offences and Fines**

It is an offence for a person to fail, without reasonable excuse, to comply with any of these directions, punishable by a fine of up to $20,000 for individuals and $100,000 for bodies corporate.

**Exemptions**

Medical exemptions mean a medical exemption recorded on the Australian Immunisation Register and displayed on an individual’s Immunisation History Statement. This may be a temporary or a permanent medical exemption. Not every health professional can grant a medical exemption. Health professionals who can grant an exemption are:

* General practice registrars on an approved 3GA training placement
* Paediatricians
* Public health physicians
* Infectious disease physicians
* Clinical immunologists
* GPs who meet certain criteria.

GPs need to be one of the following:

* Vocationally registered
* A fellow of the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP)
* A fellow of the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (ACRRM)

Your GP will know if they can grant an exemption. To grant an exemption, they must update the Australian Immunisation Register or complete a form.

There are limited reasons you might be able to get a medical exemption from having a vaccine including if you:

* had anaphylaxis after a previous dose of a vaccine
* had anaphylaxis after a dose of any component of a vaccine
* are significantly immunocompromised – for live vaccines only (NB: COVID-19 vaccines are not live vaccines).

Medical exemptions are currently available for pregnant women. However, RANZCOG and ATAGI recommend that pregnant women are routinely offered the Pfizer vaccine (Comirnarty) at any stage of pregnancy. This is because the risk of severe outcomes from COVID-19 is significantly higher for pregnant women and their unborn baby. Further information is available at Joint statement between RANZCOG and ATAGI about COVID-19 vaccination for pregnant women | Australian Government Department of Health

As confirmed in the joint statement, “women who are trying to become pregnant do not need to delay vaccination or avoid becoming pregnant after vaccination”. This also applies to breastfeeding women. You may find this information useful: COVID-19 vaccination decision guide for women who are pregnant, breastfeeding, or planning pregnancy (health.gov.au).

Please note that the Chief Health Officer is able to grant temporary or permanent exemptions in rare circumstances where a medical exemption cannot be recorded on the Australian Immunisation Register but an expert or experts approved by the Chief Health Officer have provided advice about the need for an exemption.

If you are in the process of applying for a medical exemption but that process is not yet complete, you may be able to apply for a temporary exemption.

Medical exemption information can be viewed [here](https://www.wa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-09/COVID19-Health-Worker-Exemption-Guidelines.pdf).

**Evidence**

The following forms of evidence as evidence that must be produced by a health care worker or a health support worker that they have been vaccinated against COVID-19 for the purposes of paragraph 8 of the Directions:

* written confirmation issued by the Department of Health to the health care worker or health support worker of the COVID-19 vaccination received by them; or
* a COVID-19 digital vaccination certificate or an immunisation history statement issued to the health care worker or health support worker by Medicare showing the COVID-19 vaccination recorded on the Australian Immunisation Register for that health care worker or health support worker.

The approved evidence authority by the Chief Health Officer can be viewed [here](https://www.wa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-09/CHO-form-of-Ev2.pdf).