



COVID-19 Mandatory Vaccination Frequently Asked Questions

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Introduction

To limit the spread of coronavirus (**COVID-19**) within the population of school settings, Victoria's Minister for Health has issued a Pandemic COVID-19 Mandatory Vaccination (Specified Facilities) Order (**Order**). A copy of the Order, as amended or replaced from time to time, are available on the [Pandemic Order Register](#) section of the Department of Health Website.

The Order imposes obligations upon the Diocese of Ballarat Catholic Education Limited (**DOSBCEL**) as the operator of Catholic primary and secondary schools in the Diocese of Ballarat in relation to the vaccination of staff, contractors, and volunteers.

The Order requires DOBCEL to collect, record, and hold vaccination information about all school staff, including principals, deputy principals, secondary school business managers, teachers (including emergency teachers and pre-service teachers), support staff, contractors, and volunteers (**all education workers**), who are, or may be, scheduled to attend a school.

All education workers are required to provide evidence of their fully vaccinated (boosted) vaccination status in accordance with the following booster deadline:

The Victorian Government has announced an extension to the booster deadlines for Education Workers to receive a third dose of an approved COVID-19 Vaccination:

- The third dose deadline for workers in education facilities who were fully vaccinated on or before October 25 will be extended by a month, provided that workers have a booking within that time – meaning **all education workers have until 25 March to be 'up to date'**
- Fully vaccinated workers who are **not yet eligible for a third dose will have a third dose deadline of three months and two weeks from when they had their second dose**
- Workers who are recent international arrivals will have a new third dose deadline of four weeks from the date of their arrival, provided they have evidence of a future vaccine booking.
- Workers whose temporary medical exemption (e.g., because they had COVID-19) has expired will have a new third dose deadline of two weeks following the expiry of the medical exemption.
- Hold a medical exemption evidenced by an authorised medical practitioner and submitted to the Australia Immunisation Register.

Where a new or existing employee is unable to meet the required deadlines to be fully vaccinated (boosted) with an approved COVID-19 vaccine, they will be deemed to be either partially vaccinated or unvaccinated and will not be able to attend for duties on-site.

DOBCEL remains committed to supporting the best interests of the physical health and psychological wellbeing of all students, staff and families in our schools in conjunction with appropriate government recommendations or directives to reduce the spread of COVID-19 in our schools and wider community.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What has been announced, and why?

The Victorian Minister for Health has determined that COVID-19 vaccination is mandatory for all school staff to protect children, employees and our communities from the spread of COVID-19. Mandatory vaccination requirements apply under the Order issued by the Victorian Minister for Health.

All employees working in a DOBCEL education facility need to be fully vaccinated (boosted) against COVID-19, unless a medical exception applies, by the booster deadline.

This is an important measure to ensure DOSCEL schools remain safe and are not sources of community transmission.

2. Who does the Order apply to?

The Order applies broadly and include any employees who are employed by an operator of an educational facility, referred to as education workers, including:

- principals
- deputy principals
- secondary school business managers
- teachers, including emergency teachers and pre-service teachers
- support staff
- contractors who will or may be in close proximity to children, students or staff, whether or not engaged by DOBCEL or DOBCEL schools including IT personnel, NDIS providers and auditors (but does not include delivery personnel)
- staff of the education office who attend an education facility (such as allied health or authorised officers)
- volunteers that attend the school and who work in close proximity to children, students or staff (including parent helpers)
- students on placement at the school.

3. Does this apply to emergency teachers or other casual staff engaged via an agency?

Yes. The Victorian Minister for Health has determined that vaccination will be required for everyone working in education to protect children. This includes emergency teachers and other casual non- teaching staff.

4. Are there any exceptions?

An education worker may be an excepted person if they are able to show that they meet the relevant exemption requirements under the Order. The category of excepted person is only available in very limited circumstances where a person has obtained certification from an authorised medical practitioner that they are unable, due to a medical contraindication to receive a dose, or a further dose, of a COVID-19 vaccine.

5. What are the permitted exceptions?

There are a very limited number of exceptions for medical reasons.

A person is an excepted person if the person holds an acceptable certification that they are unable to receive a dose, or a further dose, of any COVID-19 vaccine that is available in Australia due to:

- a medical contraindication; or
- an acute medical illness (including where the person has been diagnosed with COVID-19).

For the purposes of the Order, a **medical contraindication** means one of the following contraindications to the administration of a COVID-19 vaccine:

- a. anaphylaxis after a previous dose;
- b. anaphylaxis to any component of the vaccine, including polysorbate or polyethylene glycol;
- c. in relation to AstraZeneca:
 - (i) history of capillary leak syndrome; or
 - (ii) thrombosis with thrombocytopenia occurring after a previous dose;
- d. in relation to Comirnaty (Pfizer) or Spikevax (Moderna):
 - (i) myocarditis or pericarditis attributed to a previous dose of either Comirnaty or Spikevax; or
- e. where a person is in the process of completing a Federal Department of Health approved COVID-19 vaccine clinical trial
- f. the occurrence of any other serious adverse event that has:
 - (i) been attributed to a previous dose of a COVID-19 vaccine by an experienced immunisation provider or medical specialist (and not attributed to any another identifiable cause); and
 - (ii) been reported to State adverse event programs and/or the Therapeutic Goods Administration.

6. Which medical practitioners are able to provide a medical exemption certificate?

A medical practitioner who is eligible to give a certificate that a person has one of the defined medical contraindications is limited to the following practitioners:

- a general practice registrar on an approved 3GA training placement; or
- a public health physician; or
- an infectious disease physician; or
- a clinical immunologist; or
- a general practitioner who is vocationally registered; or
- a general practitioner who is a fellow of the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (**RACGP**); or
- a general practitioner who is a fellow of the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (**ACRRM**); or
- a paediatrician; or
- a medical practitioner who is a fellow of the Royal Australasian College of Physicians.

7. What if I have recovered from a COVID-19 infection?

Most people who have tested positive for COVID-19 can get a COVID-19 vaccine as soon as they are able to return to normal activities after they have completed seven days of isolation. Unless they have been hospitalised for COVID-19, there is no recommended minimum interval between infection and vaccination, and no need to delay the vaccination after recovery. Workers whose temporary medical exemption (e.g., because they had COVID-19) has expired will have a new third dose deadline of two weeks following the expiry of the medical exemption.

More information is available on the Coronavirus Victoria website www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au.

8. What will happen if employees do not get vaccinated?

DOBCel is required to take all reasonable steps to ensure that, an employee, contractor, or volunteer, who does not meet the vaccination requirements of the Order does not enter, or remain on, the premises of a DOBCel workplace, including a school, for the purposes of working at the workplace.

Principals should hold discussions as soon as possible with employees who may not meet the vaccination requirement of being fully vaccinated (boosted) to better understand their reasons for not meeting the vaccination requirements.

The requirement to be fully vaccinated (boosted) is an inherent requirement of an employee's role, in that staff are required to attend work on-site and do so safely. This is not possible unless staff meet the Order.

9. How will this be enforced for DOBCel employees?

All DOBCel workplaces, including schools, are required to collect, record and hold vaccination information about all employees who are, or may be, scheduled to attend an education facility for the purpose of working.

DOBCel school-based employees must provide vaccination information that confirms their vaccination status to the principal or the principal's delegate. Catholic Education Ballarat employees must provide a copy of their vaccination information to the Assistant Director People and Development via covid@dobcel.catholic.edu.au or in person. This information must be provided to your employer before the booster deadline date.

Staff who remain unable to meet the requirements of the Order are unable to perform the inherent requirements of their role and relevant steps will be taken in relation to the consideration of the continuation of their employment in accordance with the *Victorian Catholic Education Multi-Enterprise Agreement 2018 (VCMEA)*.

Staff that may have health-related questions or concerns about COVID-19 vaccines should seek advice and access up to date information from their medical practitioner, pharmacist or a senior and experienced immuniser at Victorian [state-run sites](#).

10. Will education workers receive priority access to booster vaccinations?

As there is sufficient capacity for COVID-19 vaccinations across General Practitioners, pharmacies, community health services, and state vaccination centers, we are advised that education workers will not receive priority access to vaccinations.

11. I am on extended leave (long service leave, parental leave or workers' compensation). Am I still required to be fully vaccinated (boosted) or have a booking by the booster deadline?

Employees who perform in an education facility must meet the vaccination requirements to attend on-site on and after the booster deadline.

Employees who are on extended leave (including long service leave, parental leave or workers compensation) must meet the vaccination requirements before they return on-site.

Principals will communicate the vaccination requirements with staff on extended periods of leave to ensure that they are fully informed of the requirements on their return to the workplace.

12. When will education workers need to be fully vaccinated (boosted) by?

All education workers are required to provide evidence of their fully vaccinated (boosted) vaccination status in accordance with the following booster deadline:

- The third dose deadline for workers in education facilities who were fully vaccinated on or before October 25 will be extended by a month, provided that workers have a booking within that time – meaning all education workers have until 25 March to be ‘up to date’
- Fully vaccinated workers who are not yet eligible for a third dose will have a third dose deadline of three months and two weeks from when they had their second dose
- Workers who are recent international arrivals will have a new third dose deadline of four weeks from the date of their arrival, provided they have evidence of a future vaccine booking.
- Workers whose temporary medical exemption (e.g., because they had COVID-19) has expired will have a new third dose deadline of two weeks following the expiry of the medical exemption.
- have a medical exemption evidenced by an authorised medical practitioner and submitted to the Australia Immunisation Register.

13. When am I considered to be fully vaccinated (boosted)?

A person’s vaccination status is one of the following:

Status	Description
Fully vaccinated	A person has received two doses of a two-dose COVID-19 vaccine including two different types of two dose COVID-19 vaccines
Fully vaccinated (boosted)	A person has received a booster dose.
Partially vaccinated	A person has received one dose of a two-dose COVID-19 vaccine and is not an excepted person
Unvaccinated	A person has not received a dose of a COVID19 vaccine and is not an excepted person
Excepted person	<p>A person holds an acceptable certification that they are unable to receive a dose, or a further dose, of any COVID-19 vaccine that is available in Australia due to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a medical contraindication; or • an acute medical illness (including where the person has been diagnosed with COVID-19)

14. What is acceptable proof of COVID-19 vaccination?

Vaccination information may be recorded in a variety of documents, such as a letter from a medical practitioner, a certificate of immunisation, or an immunisation history statement obtained from the [Australian Immunisation Register \(AIR\)](#).

There are different options for all employees to provide evidence of COVID-19 vaccination:

- COVID-19 digital certificate using the Service Victoria app or Medicare app
- COVID-19 digital certificate in a smartphone wallet
- a current COVID-19 digital certificate issued by Services Australia and displayed through the Medicare App, Service Victoria App, or equivalent smartphone wallet, that states that a person is unable to receive a dose, or a further dose, of any COVID-19 vaccine that is available in Australia
- A printed copy of the COVID-19 digital certificate

Further information on how to obtain proof of COVID-19 vaccinations is available through the [Services Australia website](#).

15. Will schools be required to check external staff and contractors' vaccination status?

Yes. Education workers must provide vaccination information before the booster deadline that confirms their vaccination status to the principal or the principal's delegate.

Employees, contractors, or volunteers who are unable to meet the requirements for vaccination status before the booster deadline must not enter, or remain on, the school premises for the purposes of working.

16. What happens if an internal or external worker is not vaccinated?

Employees, contractors, or volunteers who are unable to meet the requirements for vaccination status by the booster deadline must not enter, or remain on, the education facility premises for the purposes of working.

If an employee, contractor, or volunteer does not provide vaccination information, the school must treat the staff member, contractor, or volunteer as if they are unvaccinated.

17. Can parents, guardians, carers or students request the vaccination status of DOBCEL employees?

Employees, contractors, and volunteers have the right to privacy with regard to their vaccination status.

Where a parent, guardian carer requests evidence of vaccination, principals must ensure their response complies with their privacy obligations and in particular ensure they do not disclose any information about an individual's personal, vaccination or health status.

Responses to such requests for information should be limited to confirming that all necessary steps have been taken to ensure compliance with relevant public health orders so that the safety of staff, students, parents, guardians, carers, and the wider school community is protected.

Individual employees may choose to disclose their vaccination status but have no obligation to do so.

18. Will my principal, manager or colleagues be able to view my vaccine status?

Your vaccination status will be visible to a restricted limited number of staff nominated to record and maintain the required information along with the Principal, Manager or their nominated delegate who are required to confirm and enable compliance with the Order.

19. Will workers performing work that is not directly with children/students or other employees still need to be vaccinated?

Yes. Any person working (including volunteering) in an education facility who will or may be near children, students or employees will be required to be fully vaccinated (boosted), unless a medical exemption applies.

20. Can employees access leave to get vaccinated?

DOBCEL employees are entitled to special leave to receive their COVID-19 vaccination booster dose where an appointment cannot reasonably be made outside of usual working hours.

Employees who experience an adverse reaction to the vaccination will be able to access paid personal leave entitlements.

21. Is this requirement legal?

The Victorian Government has introduced a framework specific to pandemics in the *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008* (Vic.) – Part 8A. For more information about this framework, see [Victoria's pandemic management framework](#).

The Victorian Minister for Health can make pandemic orders to protect public health if the Premier has declared a pandemic.

In this instance, the Victorian Minister for Health has issued health orders that require operators of schools to take all reasonable steps to ensure that employees, contractors and volunteers who are not vaccinated do not attend the workplace. As an employer, DOBCEL has therefore issued a lawful and reasonable direction to employees attending schools to ensure the required health orders are met.

22. Does this requirement violate human rights?

The Victorian Minister for Health is required to provide a statement as to whether the Order does or does not limit any human right set out in the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities; and if, in the opinion of the Minister, the order as made, varied or extended does limit a human right set out in the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities, an explanation of the following is required to be published on the [Pandemic Order Register](#) section of the Department of Health website:

- the nature of the human right limited; and
- the importance of the purpose of the limitation; and
- the nature and extent of the limitation; and
- the relationship between the limitation and its purpose; and
- any less restrictive means reasonably available to achieve the purpose that the limitation seeks to achieve.

It is therefore a matter for the Victorian Minister for Health to determine whether the Orders are reasonable and proportionate taking into consideration the significant health risks posed by COVID- 19.

23. Is it against the Equal Opportunity Act for my employer or a service provider to require me to get vaccinated?

The Equal Opportunity Act prohibits discrimination in certain areas of life, including employment and the provision of goods and services, based on protected attributes such as disability. Vaccination status is not a protected attribute under the Equal Opportunity Act.

However, if an employer makes vaccinations a condition of employment, or a service provider requires proof of vaccination to access a service, this could be discrimination if you cannot be vaccinated due to a disability or other attribute protected under the Equal Opportunity Act and they do not make an exception for you.

Further information is available [here](#).

24. How can I book a COVID-19 booster vaccination?

Employees can book a COVID-19 booster vaccine appointment at a participating General Practitioner (**GP**), pharmacy, or community health service through the [Vaccine Clinic Finder](#). Staff can book an appointment online or by calling the vaccine provider nearest to them.

Employees can also book or change a vaccination appointment at a state vaccination center through the [Victorian Government's vaccine online booking system](#).

Further information in relation to how to book can be found on the [Book your vaccine appointment](#) section of the coronavirus.vic.gov.au website.

25. What mental health support can I access if I require it?

Any employee who requires personal or professional wellbeing support are encouraged to access the free confidential Employee Assistance Program through [Converge International](#).