

**Details of Croakey Health Media survey of
federal, state and territory jurisdictions
Conducted by Marie McInerney
June 2021**

Questions

We are enquiring about the COVID-19 vaccination program for people in your prisons and juvenile justice centres, for a story we plan to publish next Wednesday.

Could you please respond by COB Tuesday 8 June to the following questions:

1. Is there a national plan for vaccination of prisoners and people in detention centres? If so, is it available publicly and who has overall authority/accountability?
2. What is your state's plan for prison/detention vaccinations – what numbers of people (prisoners/detainees and staff) have been vaccinated so far, what is the target, what is the timeline?
3. Who is being given priority?
4. Is there a process especially for chronically unwell, elderly and First Nations people?
5. How will side-effects be monitored and managed?
6. How will consent be dealt with? Can you provide numbers of vaccine refusals?
7. What health promotion activities are you doing to address misinformation and vaccine hesitancy?
8. Who is providing the vaccination services (public or private contractors)?
9. Will vaccination mitigate the need for enforced quarantine and undue lockdowns such as in Melbourne?
10. Are there any vaccination plans for people facing prison/sentencing who are currently in the community?
11. How many cases of COVID-19 have you had in the prisons in your jurisdiction so far? Have you monitored impact on prisoner health and wellbeing as a result of COVID related lockdowns and disruption of prison visits? If so, could you provide details?

Responses

1. Queensland

Please attribute to a Queensland Health spokesperson:

Vaccination of prisoners and Queensland Corrective Services staff is overseen by state agencies guided by Federal Government policy.

Prisoners and critical and high-risk workers including corrective services officers fall under the 1b category which is set by the Federal Department of Health.

Vaccinations for prisoners and Queensland Corrective Services staff is currently underway and will continue to be implemented progressively.

Queensland Health will continue to work closely with Queensland Corrective Services to facilitate vaccinations.

Background only (not for attribution):

Health promotion activities in correctional centres may include questionnaires and group or one to one sessions to educate staff and answer prisoner questions.

Correctional centres also have access to similar information material as the general community. This includes posters and fact sheets on the vaccines and the vaccination process, including how to access the vaccine once prisoners leave the facility.

The vaccine is being administered to prisoners by Queensland Health's Vaccination Clinic and Prison Health Services staff within the relevant Hospital and Health Services.

Queensland Health is working with Queensland Corrective Services to assist their staff in accessing the COVID-19 vaccine. These staff are currently able to access the vaccine through Queensland Health vaccination clinics.

By nature, the prisoner population is constantly changing. It is important to note that there is not an end point for vaccination of all prisoners, with approximately 1,000 prisoners entering/leaving prison each month across the state. As such the COVID-19 vaccination program for prisoners will be ongoing.

For those who are currently in the community, they can access vaccinations as per the vaccine rollout phases to the general community.

Anyone who receives a vaccination is monitored for 15 minutes after receiving their vaccination.

Any serious health issues are managed by Prison Health Services as per normal process.

All Queenslanders who want to be vaccinated will be vaccinated through a phased approach.

Information regarding COVID-19 safety management plans for prisoners and corrective services staff can be found on the [Queensland Corrective Services website](#).

2. Victoria

Attributable to a Government spokesperson:

Police and emergency services staff and volunteers are actively participating in phase 1B of the Commonwealth Government's vaccine rollout since it was made available to them from 22 March 2021.

We're in the process of rolling out a comprehensive on-site vaccination program for staff and prisoners across all of our custodial facilities – public, private and youth.

On-site vaccinations for prisoners and staff began yesterday (7 June) and are expected to be completed within 3 months. Private prisons will follow a similar schedule.

Vaccines will be made available for as long as they are needed as part of the regular intake process.

Corrections and eligible youth justice staff are eligible to receive the vaccine as part of the 1B cohort of the Commonwealth vaccine rollout and have already been strongly encouraged to get vaccinated at state vaccination centres and general practice clinics.

Background

Vaccinating our Tier 1A workforce – in health, aged care and quarantine settings – has been our first priority in the vaccine rollout.

On-site vaccination has begun at Ravenhall Correctional Centre, Beechworth Correctional Centre, Tarrengower Prison, Barwon Prison and Malmsbury Youth Justice Centre.

All staff and prisoners are being strongly encouraged to receive the COVID-19 vaccine, including the chronically unwell, elderly and First Nations people.

Culturally appropriate communication materials about the COVID-19 vaccine are being provided to First Nations people and Aboriginal Wellbeing Officers are available to discuss concerns and to accompany prisoners in conversations with health staff.

Data will be collected for staff who receive a vaccination on-site. Staff will also be asked if they have already received a vaccination privately.

We are working to establish data collection for staff in the 1B cohort when they attend a private clinics or vaccination centres.

Vaccination is voluntary for staff, prisoners and eligible young people in custody. The vaccine provider will be adhering to their legal obligation to obtain valid consent prior to administering a vaccine. In Victorian custodial facilities, written consent is required for prisoners and young people.

Prisoners and eligible young people in custody who receive their first dose of a COVID-19 vaccine in custody and are released before receiving their second dose will be referred to a community provider in the area they will be living upon release, to enable them to receive their second dose.

Those in the community who are awaiting sentencing will be eligible to be vaccinated in line with the current eligibility for the state-wide vaccination program.

The vaccination provider will be monitoring and managing staff and clients who receive the vaccination in accordance with the requirements outlined in the Victorian COVID-19 Vaccination Guidelines, including in relation to responding and reporting on adverse events following immunisation.

All health service providers in Victorian custodial facilities must abide by standards and requirements that allow all prisoners and young people to have access to 24-hour emergency health care, should this be required in the event of an adverse event following vaccination.

Public prisons have a single provider which will deliver the vaccination program across the public prisons and youth justice facilities. Each private prison has a separate primary care provider and they will be delivering the service at their sites.

There have been no cases of COVID-19 in Victoria's prisons and custodial facilities.

3. Australian Capital Territory

Response attributable to an ACT Government spokesperson

The ACT has agreed, along with all other jurisdictions and the Federal Government, that corrections vaccinations programs are a priority due to the high risk nature of housing people in close quarters.

COVID-19 vaccinations for detainees at the Alexander McConachie Centre (AMC) began on 31 May. First doses will be offered over a two-week period, with second doses delivered after around 21 days. The vaccination program will align with the 14 days required between COVID-19 vaccine and the flu vaccination program.

Getting vaccinated is a safe and effective way to protect detainees against the severe effects of COVID-19, reducing the severity of symptoms and the need for hospitalisation should they contract the virus.

Providing access to the COVID-19 vaccine will also help to protect the community within the centre. The more detainees who have had the vaccine, the lower the risk of infection for those who are most vulnerable.

All correctional officers and staff at the Alexander Maconochie Centre are also eligible for vaccination now under phase 1b.

4. Western Australia

The following can be attributed to a WA Government spokesperson:

The Western Australian Department of Justice is working closely with the Department of Health on the program to vaccinate prisoners to commence on a voluntary basis as soon as practicable.

In the interim, the Department of Justice has begun rolling out flu vaccinations across the prison estate to ensure there is an adequate gap between the two programs.

All prison-based staff in WA are eligible for voluntary COVID-19 vaccinations and have been receiving them since March 12.

There is no mandatory requirement to report their vaccination status.

Vaccinations are just one component of a comprehensive infectious disease prevention strategy in the State's prisons and the youth detention centre.

Thankfully, no prisoner in WA has had COVID-19.

5. New South Wales

Please attribute the following response to a Justice Health and Forensic Mental Health Network spokesperson:

Justice Health and Forensic Mental Health Network (the Network) is the agency responsible for providing health care to patients living in a Corrective Service and Youth Justice settings within New South Wales.

Since early March 2021, the Network has delivered COVID-19 vaccinations in line with the Commonwealth Government advice for individuals in categories 1A and most recently 1B.

Patients who received the COVID-19 vaccination have been given the same information as the public in order to help them make an informed decision.

A doctor was made available at all the vaccination clinics to ensure patients who had questions had access to expert medical advice. Information about the vaccine was also provided in other languages, as well as easy to read formats.

As vaccination is voluntary, all patients had to give their informed consent before receiving the vaccine. Patients were monitored after receiving the vaccine to ensure no serious side effects.

The Network has worked with partner agencies, Corrective Services New South Wales and Youth Justice New South Wales, to protect patients from COVID-19. To date, there has been no cases of COVID-19 community transmission within any New South Wales Correctional or Youth Justice Centres."

Background Information

Any national vaccination plan enquiry should be directed to the Australian Government Department of Health.

Croakey asked further:

- *Does that mean particular prisoners have been classified higher priority than others, if so, can you detail?*
- *Can you say how many vaccine doses have been given so far, and what percentage of the prison population that represents?*
- *When is the rollout expected to be complete?*
- *Are prison staff included?*

Response:

We will not be providing any further comment.

For Background Only

Questions about the policy of COVID-19 vaccinations, such as categories, should be referred to the Federal Government Department of Health. You can also find out more information about COVID-19 Vaccination phases here <https://www.health.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/covid-19-vaccines/phase-1b>.

6. South Australia

As of Tuesday 8 June 2021, almost 1,400 correctional officers, health staff and prisoners in South Australia had received their first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine.

The vaccination program is being provided by SA Health in conjunction with the Department of Correctional Services. The program is ongoing as new prisoners enter the system and others nominate to receive the vaccine.

All prisoners have received the same informed consent and health information available to the broader community before receiving their vaccine.

7. Tasmania

The Tasmanian Prison Service began its rollout of the Pfizer vaccine from April 2021 for both prisoners and staff.

The commencement of the rollout is due to prisons being identified as a higher-risk setting, and will ensure the safety of both staff and prisoners from COVID-19.

The rollout, including both first and second doses of the vaccine, is well advanced and is expected to be completed in coming weeks.

8. Northern Territory

Attributable to an NT Health Spokesperson:

The COVID-19 vaccine roll-out has commenced in NT prison populations with both the Darwin Correctional Centre and the Alice Springs Correctional Facility underway.

It is expected everyone currently within NT correctional facilities who wants a COVID-19 vaccination will have been offered one and have received at least one dose over the next few months.

All Territorians are required to provide consent to a COVID-19 vaccination, and resources are available ensure anyone being vaccinated is fully informed.

Background:

- All Territorians over the age of 16 are eligible for a COVID-19 vaccination (effective Monday 7 June)
- The Northern Territory has had no community transmission of COVID-19 and no deaths
- Vaccination of prison populations is managed by NT Health
- Data in relation to prison staff is not available as it is not a data set NT Health keep
- Consent from prison populations is no different to the general population and in line with national guidelines
- Management of side-effects is no different to the general population and in line with national guidelines
- The COVID-19 vaccine is voluntary, no one is forced to have it. NT Health does not record 'refusals'
- The Northern Territory has not experienced lockdowns like other Australian jurisdictions.
- The Chief Health Officer only ever issues directions for the health and safety of Territorians. This will continue as clinically required.

9. Federal Government

Croakey submitted a number of questions to Health Minister Greg Hunt's office on two issues, including a first section on the vaccine rollout in prisons:

1. *Does the Minister have any oversight/authority on the rollout of COVID-19 vaccinations to prisons/immigration detention centres/youth justice facilities (those held and staff)?*
2. *What priority have these groups been given under the Commonwealth's plan <https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2020/12/covid-19-vaccination-australian-covid-19-vaccination-policy.pdf>? Can you link me to where their priority is stated?*
3. *Is the Minister concerned that many prisoners who, like people in aged care are high risk of poor outcomes from COVID-19, are yet to be vaccinated?*
4. *Can you report numbers/targets/timelines to date?*

Response from spokesperson for Minister:

Regarding your first questions, prisons are a matter for States and Territories.