

Guidance for COVID-19 vaccinations for children and young people in out-of-home care

1 November 2021

Introduction

Vaccination is a critical step in keeping our community safe, including our most vulnerable children, young people, and families.

The COVID-19 vaccines are safe, effective and free.

This guidance provides information about eligibility, access, and consent for the COVID-19 vaccination for children and young people in care.

COVID-19 Vaccine eligibility for children and young people

Vaccine eligibility may change over time, and advice will be updated accordingly, changes will be highlighted in yellow.

- Currently, anyone aged 12 years and over (whether they are in out-of-home care or not) is eligible to receive the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines. Learn about how to book and where to get [the vaccination](https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/book-your-vaccine-appointment) (coronavirus.vic.gov.au/book-your-vaccine-appointment).

Anyone who wants to be vaccinated must provide informed consent. Consent can be provided verbally.

For young people aged 12-17 years, consent may be established by:

- A parent or guardian attending the vaccination appointment with the young person and providing consent (note: only one parent or guardian may attend with the young person).
- A young person providing their own consent, if deemed to be a mature minor by an experienced immuniser. That means that the health professional assesses that a young person understands the information relevant to the decision to be vaccinated and the effect of that decision.
- A young person attending a vaccination centre with a [consent form](#) signed by a parent or guardian, or authorised Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of an out-of-home care service or authorised carer.
- The health professional administering the vaccination obtaining verbal consent (over the phone) from the child or young person's parent or guardian, or authorised CEO of an out-of-home care service or authorised carer.

People who are vulnerable and at high risk from COVID-19 can access priority Pfizer vaccine appointments. To book a reserved appointment call the 24/7 Coronavirus Hotline on 1800 675 398.

Consent and vaccinations

When can a child or young person provide consent for their vaccination?

Young people with sufficient maturity and understanding of their medical situation and the proposed treatment, are legally able to consent to, or refuse treatment, including the COVID-19 vaccines.

Determining when a child is competent to consent to or refuse medical treatment is an assessment for a health professional.

A child or young person can consent to their COVID-19 vaccination at a Victorian Government vaccination centre where an experienced health professional will determine competency as a mature minor.

Under the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* (CYFA) the Secretary of the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing can't override the ability of a competent child to consent to or refuse the vaccine.

Consent where a child or young person is in out-of-home care

Where a child or young person is in out-of-home care, Child Protection, the authorised CEO of an out-of-home care service or authorised residential, foster or kinship carer (must hold a current authorisation) can make decisions about routine medical care for the child or young person. This includes vaccinations on the recommendation of a registered health professional (medical practitioner, nurse, midwife or pharmacist in the lawful practice of their profession).

When the long-term objective is for the child to be reunited with family or when the child or young person is subject to an Interim Accommodation Order, parents should be engaged to the fullest extent possible and their consent sought before making the decision. Child protection (case planner), authorised CEO of an out-of-home care service or authorised carer (authorised foster carer, kinship carer or residential carer) can make the decision to provide consent if deemed to be in the best interests of the child or young person.

Where a parent cannot be contacted or refuses to give consent, the CYFA allows for Child Protection (case planner), authorised CEO of an out-of-home care service or authorised carer (with current authorisation) to provide consent if a registered health professional has advised that the vaccine is necessary to avoid a serious threat to the health of the child.

In other circumstances parents should be kept informed where this is compatible with the case plan.

Involving and informing parents

The [Best Interest Case Practice Model](#) requires that professionals in child protection and placement and support services work with families in a relationship-based, child focussed and family centred way. This includes involving parents, and where appropriate, children and young people in key decisions relevant to them. Immunisations and health interventions are some of these key decisions.

For some people, COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy may influence their decision-making about whether to consent to vaccination for themselves or their children.

Parents should be supported to be involved in considerations and decision making for their children in relation to COVID-19 vaccinations where possible, unless this is contrary to the child's best interests. Where parents are reluctant to consent, they should be supported to obtain medical advice from a GP, the 24/7 Coronavirus Hotline, or at [COVID-19 vaccines](#) to be as informed as possible. The risks for their children if they are not vaccinated should be explained to them by a health professional.

In relation to involving parents in routine medical issues for a child in out-of-home care, including vaccines, the key consideration is the best interests of the child. This includes considering and giving the child's views and wishes weight appropriate to the circumstances.

The provision or disclosure of children's health information needs to be consistent with the health information sharing principles in the *Health Records Act 2001*. For further information see [Information Sharing in child protection practice](#).

When a child or young person in care objects to receiving the COVID-19 vaccine

Where appropriate consent has been provided for a child to receive the COVID-19 vaccine, it's important to note that a child or young person is not forced to receive the vaccine.

Carers should discuss with the child their concerns and support them to understand why the vaccine is recommended. There are a range of materials to assist with this conversation (coronavirus.vic.gov.au/vaccine).

Further advice can be found in the CP manual:

[Authorising carers - advice](#)

<cpmanual.vic.gov.au/advice-and-protocols/advice/out-home-care/administration/authorising-carers>

For additional information regarding the COVID-19 vaccines please refer to below links.

[Coronavirus.vic.gov.au](https://coronavirus.vic.gov.au)

<coronavirus.vic.gov.au>

[COVID-19 vaccines](#)

<coronavirus.vic.gov.au/vaccine>

[Who can get vaccinated against COVID-19](#)

<coronavirus.vic.gov.au/who-can-get-vaccinated>

[Victorian COVID-19 Vaccination Guidelines](#)

<coronavirus.vic.gov.au/victorian-covid-19-vaccination-guidelines>

[Latest news and information about COVID-19 vaccines in Australia](#)

<health.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/covid-19-vaccines>

[COVID-19 vaccine information in your language](#)

<health.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/covid-19-vaccines/covid-19-vaccine-information-in-your-language>

[What should I do before I get vaccinated for COVID-19?](#)

<health.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/covid-19-vaccines/getting-vaccinated-for-covid-19/what-should-i-do-before-i-get-vaccinated-for-covid-19>

[What happens after I am vaccinated for COVID-19?](#)

<health.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/covid-19-vaccines/getting-vaccinated-for-covid-19/what-happens-after-i-am-vaccinated-for-covid-19>

[Consent form for COVID-19 vaccination](#)

<health.gov.au/resources/publications/covid-19-vaccination-consent-form-for-covid-19-vaccination>

[Preparing for COVID-19 vaccination](#)

<health.gov.au/resources/publications/covid-19-vaccination-preparing-for-covid-19-vaccination>

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Available at [Coronavirus.vic.gov.au – Vaccination information for children and teenagers](https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/vaccination-information-children-and-teenagers)

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