

Information note – COVID-19 situation update

26 July 2021

This is a background document only and does not purport to be a comprehensive discussion of the issues involved. It does not represent the view of the Fair Work Commission on any issue.

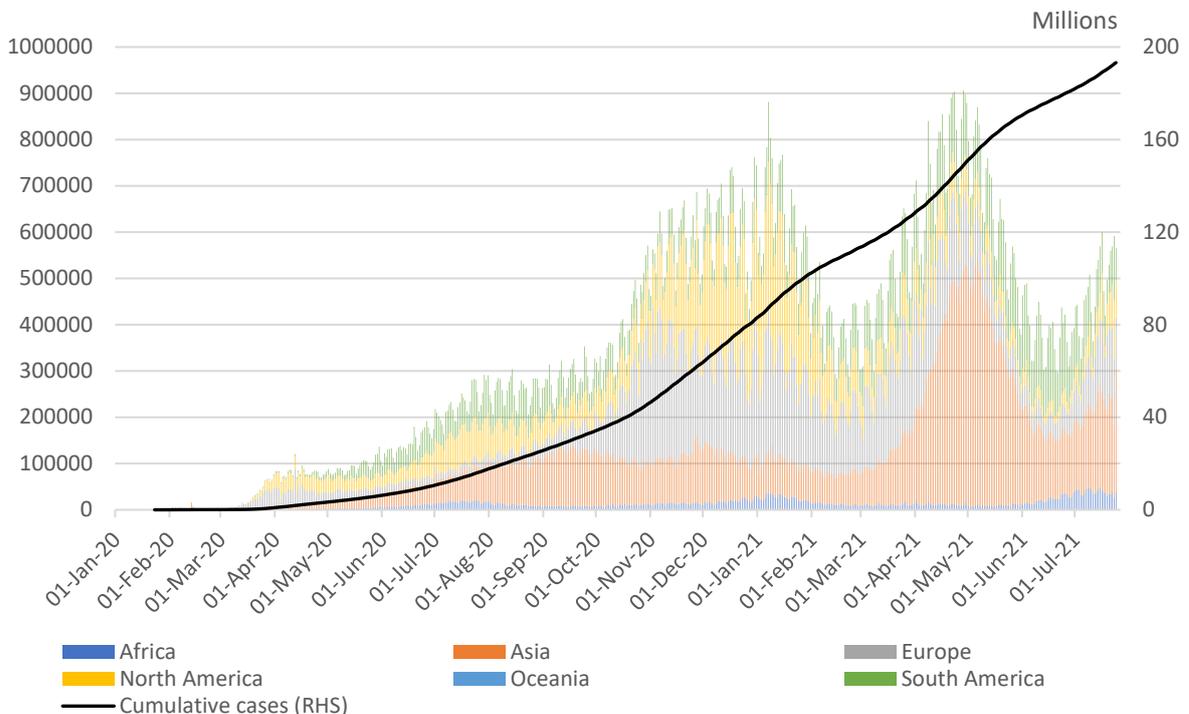
This information note provides an update of the current rate of transmission of COVID-19 in Australia and globally, as well as regarding the rollout of COVID-19 vaccinations in Australia.

Global COVID-19 statistics

According to John Hopkins University, as at 26 July 2021, there had been:¹

- 194 087 699 total cases of COVID-19; and
- 4 158 226 total deaths.

Chart 1: Daily and cumulative number of reported COVID-19 cases globally and by region



Note: Data by region is taken from Our World in Data using original data on case numbers from John Hopkins University.

Source: Roser M, Ritchie H, Ortiz-Ospina E, and Hasell J (2020) [Coronavirus Pandemic \(COVID-19\)](#), published online at OurWorldInData.org, updated 24 July 2021.

National COVID-19 statistics

The Commonwealth Department of Health provides a daily update on COVID-19 cases from when the first case of COVID-19 was detected in Australia in late January 2020.

¹ Johns Hopkins University (2021), [COVID-19 Dashboard](#), Center for Systems Science and Engineering, updated 26 July.

The data show that:

- As at 25 July 2021, Australia has had a total of 32 917 cases of COVID-19, 918 deaths and there are currently an estimated 2117 active cases.
- In the previous 24 hours, there were 154 locally-acquired cases (141 in New South Wales, 11 in Victoria and 2 in South Australia) and 7 overseas-acquired cases were recorded.²

Within the Commonwealth Department of Health, the COVID-19 National Incident Room Surveillance Team has been releasing regular Epidemiology reports since the week of 26 January to 1 February 2020, based on data extracted from the National Notifiable Diseases Surveillance System (NNDSS).³ The latest of these reports covers the fortnightly reporting period ending 4 July 2021 and, based on data available at that time, found that the number of new cases reported nationally increased to 407 compared with 121 cases reported in the previous fortnight (7 to 20 June 2021).⁴ There were 29 cases reported on average per day over the period, an increase from 9 in the previous fortnight. The largest number of cases diagnosed were in New South Wales (317, or 78 per cent), Queensland (36, or 9 per cent) and Victoria (28, or 7 per cent).⁵

The latest epidemiology report noted, for the reporting period to 20 June 2021, that:

‘In this reporting period, the majority of cases were reported as locally acquired (83%; 338/407), with all states and territories except the Australian Capital Territory and Tasmania reporting locally-acquired cases. In this fortnight, 314 locally-acquired cases had a known contact or cluster source; one case from Queensland had an unknown source; and investigations into the source of infection for 20 cases (16 in New South Wales and four in Queensland) were ongoing. At the end of this reporting period, two cases from Queensland were classified as under initial investigation’.⁶

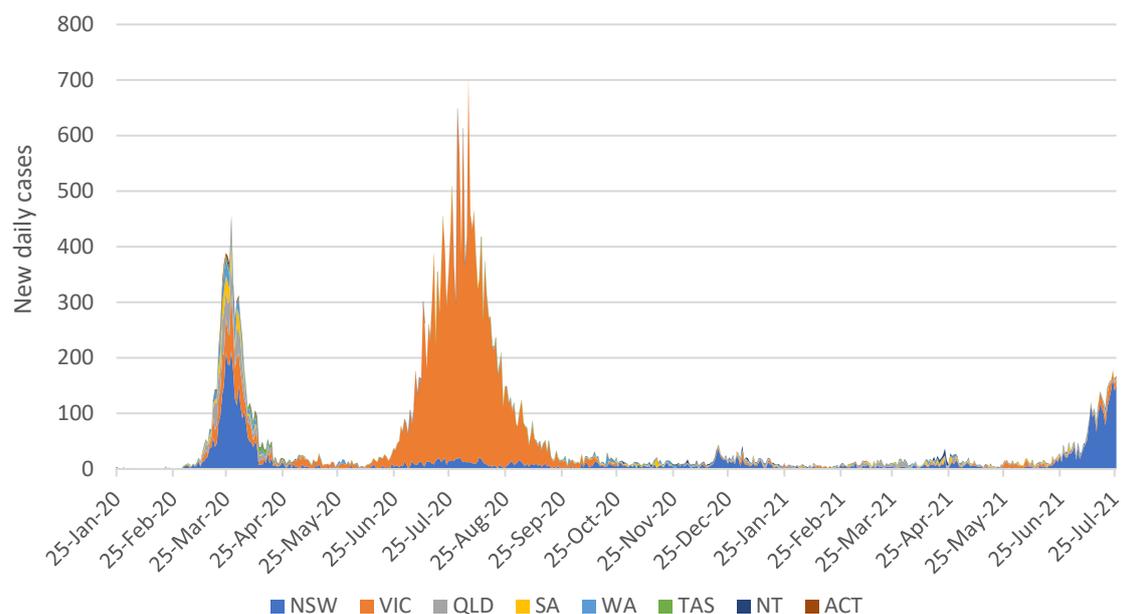
² Department of Health (2021), [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) current situation and case numbers](#), Commonwealth Government of Australia, 26 July.

³ Department of Health (2020), [Coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\) epidemiology reports, Australia, 2020](#), Commonwealth Government of Australia, 22 July.

⁴ COVID-19 National Incident Room Surveillance Team (2021), [COVID-19, Australia: Epidemiology Report 45: Reporting fortnight ending 4 July 2021](#), Communicable Diseases Intelligence Volume 45, 16 July, p. 1; COVID-19 National Incident Room Surveillance Team (2021), [COVID-19, Australia: Epidemiology Report 44: Reporting fortnight ending 20 June 2021](#), Communicable Diseases Intelligence Volume 45, 6 July, p. 1.

⁵ COVID-19 National Incident Room Surveillance Team (2021), [COVID-19, Australia: Epidemiology Report 45: Reporting fortnight ending 4 July 2021](#), Communicable Diseases Intelligence Volume 45, 16 July, p. 2.

⁶ COVID-19 National Incident Room Surveillance Team (2021), [COVID-19, Australia: Epidemiology Report 45: Reporting fortnight ending 4 July 2021](#), Communicable Diseases Intelligence Volume 45, 16 July, p. 2.

Chart 2: New daily confirmed COVID-19 cases in Australia in states and territories

Note: The data are obtained from a variety of [state and commonwealth sources](#). Chart shows gross new daily cases as announced (not net added to total) except for Victoria, which shows true daily cases. To understand the term 'true daily cases' and see a comparison.

Source: [COVID-19 in Australia](#), covid19data.com.au, 26 July 2021.

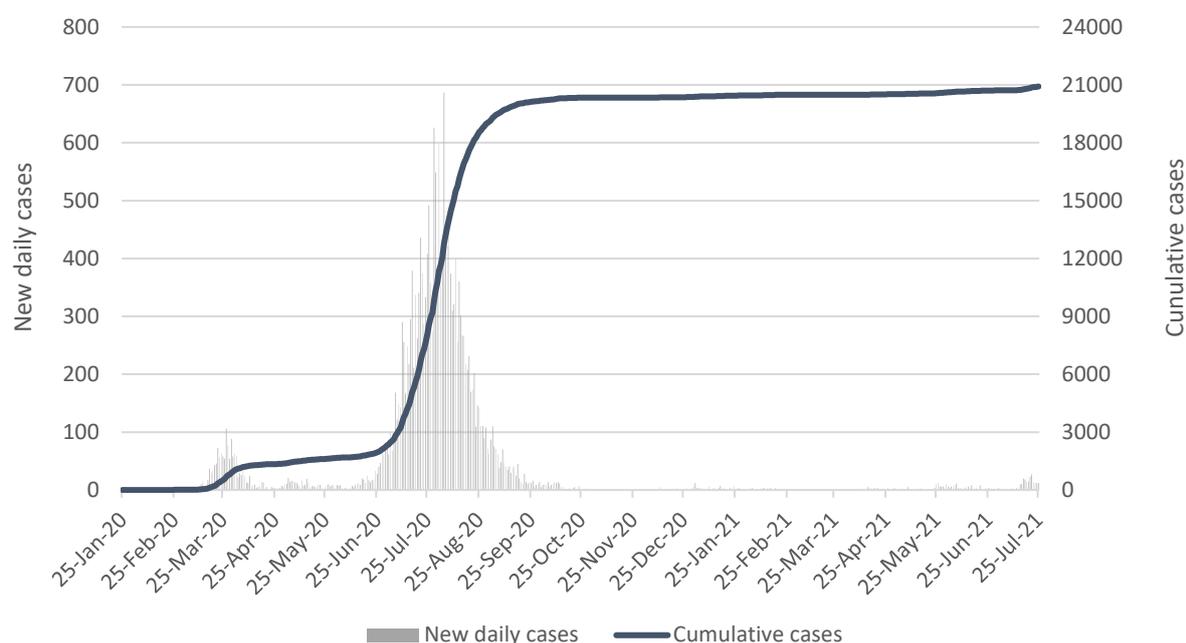
Data in Chart 2 show the significant increase in new daily cases in Australia in July and August 2020, which was mainly due to Victoria, as well as a small but sustained level of new daily cases recorded in New South Wales from late June 2020. It also shows the decline in case numbers in September and October, largely due to continued decline in new cases in Victoria, which is likely associated with the restrictions in place at that time.⁷ It also reveals a slight uptick in new cases reported in New South Wales commencing in mid-December 2020 and declining in late January 2021. From late May, there was a slight uptick in reported daily cases, predominately in Victoria and New South Wales. Further increases in new cases were recorded in New South Wales into July 2021.

State outbreaks of COVID-19

Victoria

Chart 3 highlights the much larger number of cases recorded in Victoria between July and September 2020 than at the early stages of the epidemic in March 2020. It also shows that cases in Victoria peaked in early August 2020, steadily falling since then and achieving 41 consecutive days of zero cases to 10 December 2020. There were sustained but low numbers of new cases from 11 December 2020 to 19 January 2021, with zero or very low new cases reported from then until 25 May 2021, when 10 new cases were reported, and double-digit cases were reported a further 3 days to 10 June 2021. Daily new cases peaked at 27 on 21 July 2021.

⁷ COVID-19 National Incident Room Surveillance Team (2020), [COVID-19, Australia: Epidemiology Report 25: Reporting fortnight ending 13 September 2020](#), Communicable Diseases Intelligence Volume 44, 23 September, p. 1.

Chart 3: Daily and cumulative number of reported COVID-19 cases in Victoria

Source: Victorian Department of Health and Human Service, [Victorian coronavirus \(COVID-19\) data](#), last updated 25 July 2021.

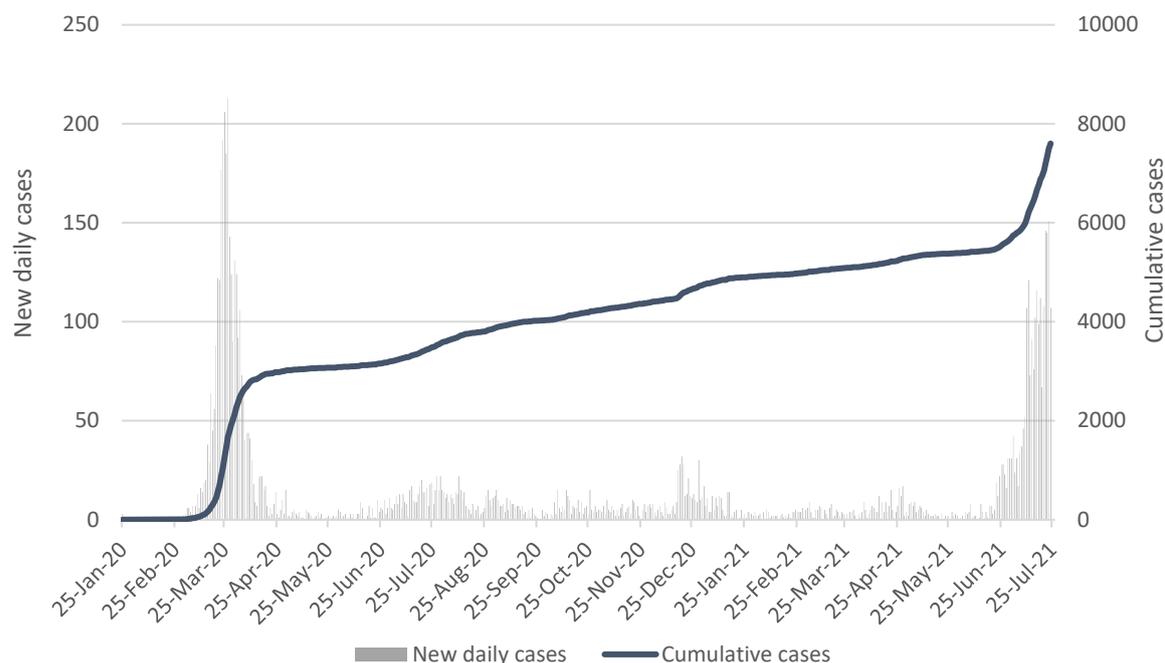
On 21 June, the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) released a statement on recent outbreaks of COVID-19 in Victoria, noting that due to the continued growth in confirmed cases overseas and the number of Australians still overseas who may return; as well as sporadic community transmission in Australia, that it remains probable that Australia will experience periodic outbreaks.⁸

New South Wales

Chart 4 shows the daily new cases and cumulative cases of COVID-19 recorded in NSW. It shows that although the numbers of cases are lower than the peak of the epidemic in March and April 2020, there was a gradual increase in new daily cases in June and July. The chart also shows the spike in cases around December 2020 and January 2021.

New daily cases of COVID-19 in New South Wales significantly increased from late June 2021, reaching levels not seen since March 2020.

⁸ Department of Health (2020), [Australian Health Protection Principal Committee \(AHPPC\) statement on recent outbreaks of COVID-19 in Victoria](#), Commonwealth Government of Australia, 21 June.

Chart 4: Daily and cumulative number of reported COVID-19 cases in NSW

Note: Case counts reported by NSW Health for a particular notification date may vary over time due to ongoing investigations and the outcome of cases under review, thus this dataset and any historical data contained within is subject to change on a daily basis.

Source: New South Wales Government, [NSW COVID-19 cases data](#), Data.NSW, last updated 24 July 2021.

Other states

Chart 5 shows the number of new daily cases across other states.

South Australia

South Australia experienced a spike in community transmission of COVID-19 in mid-November. This peaked at 18 new cases reported on 16 November 2020.⁹ Cases fell below 5 per day from 18 November.¹⁰

The number of reported new daily cases began to increase in late June into July 2021, with 11 cases reported on 30 June 2021 and 6 cases on 6 July 2021.

Queensland

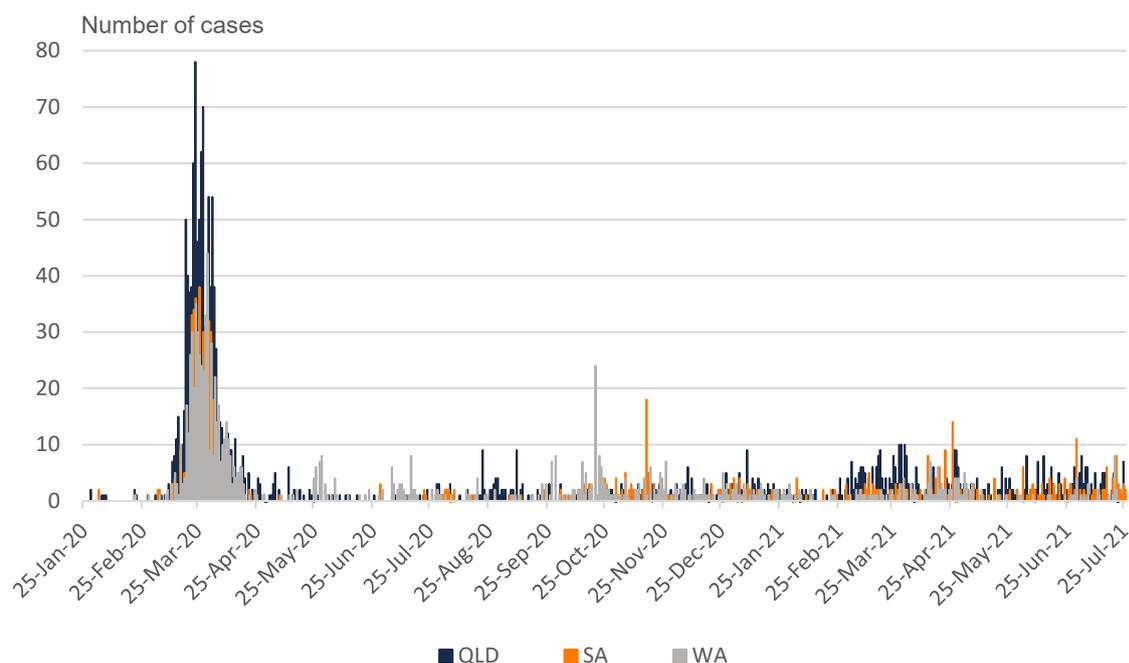
New cases of COVID-19 were reported in January 2021, peaking at 9 cases on 8 January. A spike in new daily cases also occurred in late March and early April 2021, peaking at 10 cases in a day. There were further cases reported throughout June and July 2021, peaking at 8 cases on both 13 June and 3 July.

Western Australia

There was an increase in new daily cases reported across mid-April, including 7 cases on 14 April and 6 cases on 18 April 2021. There was 1 new daily case reported on 27 June 2021.

⁹ Government of South Australia (2020), [Dashboard table data: Daily cases - SA](#), 22 November.

¹⁰ Government of South Australia (2020), [Dashboard table data: Daily cases - SA](#), 22 November.

Chart 5: Daily number of reported COVID-19 cases in QLD, SA and WA

Note: The data are obtained from a variety of state and commonwealth sources. Chart shows gross new daily cases as announced, including those acquired in hotel quarantine.

Source: [COVID-19 in Australia](#), covid19data.com.au, 26 July 2021.

Vaccinations

[On 7 January 2021](#), the Prime Minister stated that Australia's vaccination rollout would have 5 phases of priority populations to receive vaccinations over 2021. He also stated that the aim would be to administer around 80 000 vaccinations a week initially, with that figure building up over 4 to 6 weeks with a target of reaching 4 million people by the end of March.¹¹

Australia's COVID-19 vaccination rollout began on 22 February 2021.¹² The vaccines were to be rolled out in three phases based on priority. Phase 1a included approximately 678 000 people comprised of quarantine and border workers; frontline health care workers (priority based); aged care and disability care staff and residents. Phase 1b¹³ began on 22 March 2021,¹⁴ and was to cover approximately 6.1 million people that included people aged 70 years and above; other health care workers; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people over the age of 55 years; younger adults with an underlying medical condition (including those with a disability); and critical and high risk workers. Phase 2a began on 3 May 2021, and was to cover approximately 6.6 million people and include people between the ages 50 and 69 years; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people between the ages of 18 and 54; and other critical and high-risk workers. Phase 2b (start date unconfirmed), of approximately 6.6 million people, will vaccinate the remaining balance of the adult population. Finally, Phase 3 will vaccinate (if recommended) all people under the age of 18 years

¹¹ Prime Minister of Australia (2021), [Press Conference - Australian Parliament House](#), 7 January.

¹² Department of Health (2021), [First COVID-19 vaccinations in Australia](#), 21 February.

¹³ Department of Health (2021), [COVID-19 vaccination – Phase 1b rollout](#), updated 17 March.

¹⁴ Department of Health (2021), [Phase 1B COVID-19 vaccination rollout begins](#), 22 March

(approximately 5.7 million people).¹⁵ The initial timeline of the rollout was to offer a vaccine to all Australians by the end of October 2021.¹⁶

Australia entered into four separate agreements for the supply of COVID-19 vaccines.¹⁷ These agreements are with Pfizer-BioNtech, originally for 10 million doses and subsequently increased by an additional 10 million doses;¹⁸ AstraZeneca for 53.8 million doses; Novavax for 51 million doses; and COVAX Facility for a range of vaccines and number of doses.

According to figures from the Commonwealth Department of Health, on 25 July 2021:¹⁹

- 11 211 447 vaccine doses had been administered;
 - 38.0 per cent of the population aged 16 years and over had received 1 dose;
 - 16.3 per cent of the population aged 16 years and over had received 2 doses;
- Victoria and NSW have administered the most vaccine doses, with 1 529 832 and 1 345 647 doses, respectively; and
- the Australian Capital Territory and Northern Territory have administered the least number of vaccine doses, with 125 189 and 84 009 doses, respectively.

On 8 April 2021, the Commonwealth Government announced that, on the advice of the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI), the Pfizer-BioNtech vaccine is now the recommended vaccine for adults under 50 years.²⁰ The recommendation was based on the increased risk of thrombosis with thrombocytopenia following AstraZeneca vaccinations among those under 50 years. Where the benefit outweighs the risk, the AstraZeneca vaccine may be used for certain adults under 50 years.

On 9 April 2021, the Commonwealth Government announced it would continue the Australian Vaccination Strategy for groups under Phase 1a and 1b, however, that future phases will require a recalibration in light of the ATAGI recommendation.²¹ Additionally, it was also announced that the Commonwealth Government had secured an additional 20 million doses of the Pfizer-BioNtech vaccine, bringing the total to 40 million. The additional doses are anticipated to arrive in Australia in the December quarter of 2021.²²

On 22 April 2021, National Cabinet agreed to limit access to the Pfizer vaccine to: people aged under 50 years in eligible phases 1a and 1b; residential aged care residents; disability care residents with complex needs; certain people in remote and very remote communities; and, in very limited circumstances, to quarantine, border force, and health workers 50 years and older not already vaccinated. Additionally, access to the AstraZeneca vaccine for phase 2a eligible people between the ages of 50 and 69 years was brought forward, beginning from 3 May 2021 for General

¹⁵ Department of Health (2021), [Australia's COVID-19 vaccine national roll-out strategy](#), accessed 17 March.

¹⁶ Prime Minister of Australia (2021), [First COVID-19 Vaccinations](#), 21 February.

¹⁷ Department of Health (2021), [Australia's vaccine agreements](#), updated 9 April.

¹⁸ Prime Minister of Australia (2021), [Press Conference – Australian Parliament House ACT](#), 9 April.

¹⁹ Department of Health (2021), [Australia's COVID-19 vaccine rollout](#), updated 25 July.

²⁰ Department of Health (2021), [Joint statement on COVID-19 AstraZeneca vaccine advice from ATAGI](#), 8 March.

²¹ Prime Minister of Australia (2021), [National Cabinet Statement](#), 9 April.

²² Prime Minister of Australia (2021), [Press Conference – Australian Parliament House. ACT](#), 9 April.

Practice Respiratory Clinics and state and territory vaccination centres, and from 17 May 2021 for General Practice Clinics.²³

On 13 May 2021, the Commonwealth Government announced that subject to approval from the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA), it had secured 25 million doses of the Moderna vaccine.²⁴ The agreement consists of 10 million doses in 2021 and 15 million doses of Moderna's updated variant booster vaccine in 2022.

According to the 2021–22 Commonwealth Budget, a key assumption underpinning its economic forecasts is that '[i]t is assumed that a population-wide vaccination program is likely to be in place by the end of 2021'.²⁵ On 12 May 2021, the Prime Minister clarified that '...there's a general assumption of a vaccination program likely to be in place ... by the end of this year' and 'an understanding that over the course of this year the vaccination program will continue to roll out, and will reach as many Australians as we possibly can that want to have that vaccine'.²⁶ Chart 5 shows the daily vaccination doses in Australia since 22 February 2021, as well as the cumulative total and shows that the number of vaccination doses administered per day has been steadily increasing since mid-May 2021.

On 28 June 2021, National Cabinet noted that the Commonwealth will establish a COVID-19 professional indemnity scheme covering COVID-19 vaccines approved by the TGA and approved for use in the vaccine program.²⁷ Additionally, National Cabinet agreed to mandate that at least the first dose of a COVID-19 vaccine be administered by mid-September 2021 for all residential aged care workers.²⁸

On 2 July 2021, National Cabinet released the *National Plan to transition Australia's National COVID Response*.²⁹ The plan consists of 4 stages:

- **Stage A: Continue to suppress the virus for the purpose of minimising community transmission**, includes:
 - To offer every Australian an opportunity to be vaccinated;
 - Temporarily reduce commercial inbound passenger arrivals by 50 per cent;
 - Used lockdowns as a last resort;
 - Expand trials for limited entry of student on economic visa holders.
- **Stage B: Seek to minimise serious illness, hospitalisation and fatality as a result of COVID-19**, includes:
 - Easing restrictions on vaccinated residents;
 - Use lockdowns only in extreme circumstances to prevent escalating hospitalisation and fatality;

²³ Prime Minister of Australia (2021), [National Cabinet](#), 22 April

²⁴ Prime Minister of Australia (2021), [Australia Secures Moderna Vaccines](#), 13 May

²⁵ Australian Government (2021), [2021-22 Budget Strategy and Outlook, Budget Paper No. 1](#), 11 May, p. 36.

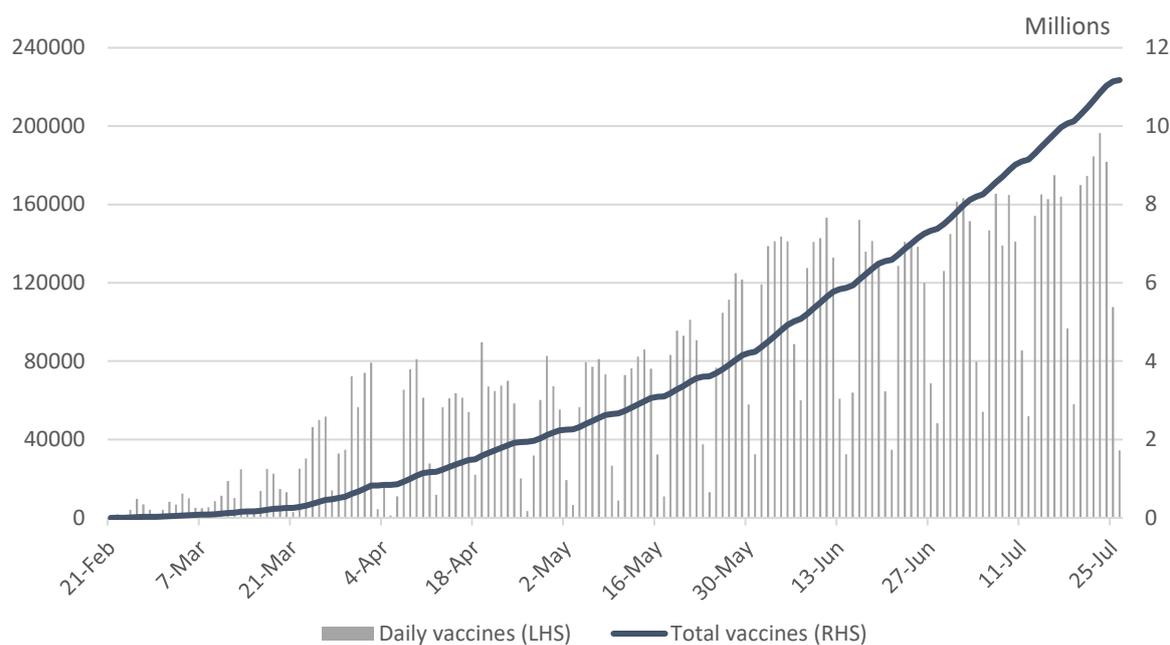
²⁶ Prime Minister of Australia (2021), [Interview with Leigh Sales, 7:30](#), 12 May.

²⁷ Prime Minister of Australia (2021), [Virtual Press Conference](#), 28 June; Prime Minister of Australia (2021), [National Cabinet Statement](#), 28 June;

²⁸ Prime Minister of Australia (2021), [National Cabinet Statement](#), 28 June.

²⁹ Prime Minister of Australia (2021), [National Cabinet Statement](#), 2 July.

- Restore inbound passengers caps at previous levels for unvaccinated returning travellers and larger caps for vaccinated returning travellers;
- Allow capped entry of student and economic visa holders.
- **Stage C: Manage COVID-19 consistent with public health management of other infectious disease**, includes:
 - No more lockdowns;
 - Exempt vaccinated resident from all domestic restrictions;
 - Abolish caps on returning vaccinated travellers
 - Allow increased capped entry of student, economic, and humanitarian visa holders;
 - Lift all restrictions on outbound travel for vaccinated persons;
 - Extend travel bubble for unrestricted travel to new candidate countries (Singapore, Pacific).
- **Stage D: Manage COVID-19 consistent with public health management of other infectious diseases**, includes:
 - Allow uncapped inbound arrivals for all vaccinated persons, without quarantine; and
 - Allow uncapped arrivals of non-vaccinated travellers subject to pre-flight and on arrival testing.

Chart 6: Daily and total vaccine doses administered

Note: Data collected via press conferences and media releases since late February 2021, and since late April 2021 from the Vaccine Operations Centre Weekly Operational Updates (however these updates do not include running totals). The site states that 'Tracking supply of vaccines has been challenging. These data should be read with caution.

Source: [COVID-19 in Australia](https://covid19data.com.au), covid19data.com.au, 26 July 2021.