

# Information note – COVID-19 situation update

## 22 December 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.

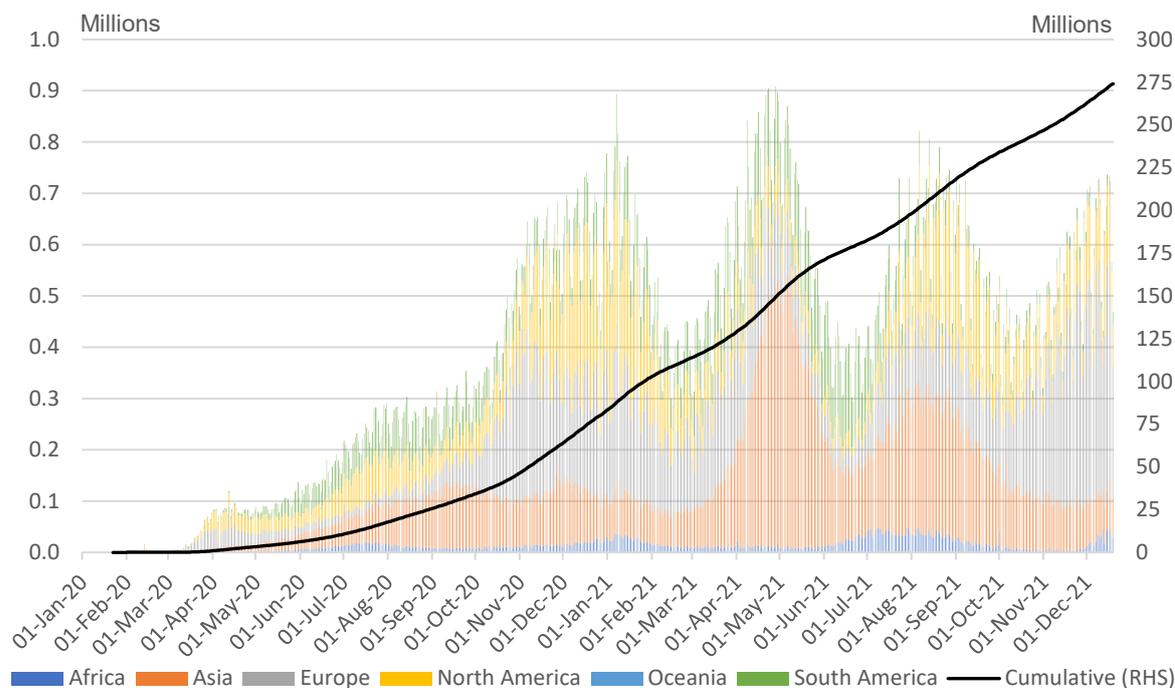
This information note provides an update of the current rate of transmission of COVID-19 in Australia and globally, as well as regarding the rollout of COVID-19 vaccinations in Australia.

### Global COVID-19 statistics

According to John Hopkins University, as at 21 December 2021, there had been:<sup>1</sup>

- 275 349 812 total cases of COVID-19; and
- 5 359 751 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 to 19 December 2021.

<sup>1</sup> Johns Hopkins University (2021), [COVID-19 Dashboard](#), Center for Systems Science and Engineering, updated 21 December.

## 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.

The data show that:

- As at 20 December 2021, Australia has had a total of 254 685 cases of COVID-19, 2146 deaths and there are currently an estimated 30 155 active cases.
- In the previous 24 hours, 656 locally-acquired cases (314 in Victoria, 259 in New South Wales, 40 in South Australia, 25 in Queensland, 9 in the Australian Capital Territory, 6 in the Northern Territory and 3 in Tasmania) and 11 overseas-acquired cases were recorded, and a further 3323 cases were under investigation.<sup>2</sup>

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).<sup>3</sup> The latest of these reports covers the fortnightly reporting period ending 5 December 2021 and, based on data available at that time, found that the number of new cases reported nationally increased to 19 164 compared with 18 000 cases reported in the previous fortnight (ending 21 November 2021).<sup>4</sup> There were 1369 cases reported on average per day over the period, an increase from 1285 in the previous fortnight. The majority of cases diagnosed were in Victoria (15 616, or 81 per cent) and New South Wales (3325, or 17 per cent).<sup>5</sup>

The latest epidemiology report noted that:

'In this reporting period, >99% of cases notified (19,002/19,164) were considered to be acquired within Australia, comprising 48% (9,237/19,164) identified as cases acquired within the reporting jurisdiction, 50% (9,659/19,164) categorised as cases under initial investigation, and 106 interstate-acquired cases; <1% of cases (149/19,164) were overseas acquired and 13 cases were missing a source of acquisition...

Victoria reported the majority of locally-acquired cases (82%; 15,592/19,002) in this fortnight, followed by New South Wales (17%; 3,217/19,002) and the Australian Capital Territory (1%; 109/19,002). Cases acquired within the jurisdiction of notification were reported in the Australian Capital Territory, New South Wales, the Northern Territory, Queensland, South Australia, and Victoria. The Australian Capital Territory, New South Wales, the Northern Territory, Queensland and South Australia reported infections that were acquired in another jurisdiction. Tasmania and Western Australia did not report any locally acquired cases.<sup>6</sup>

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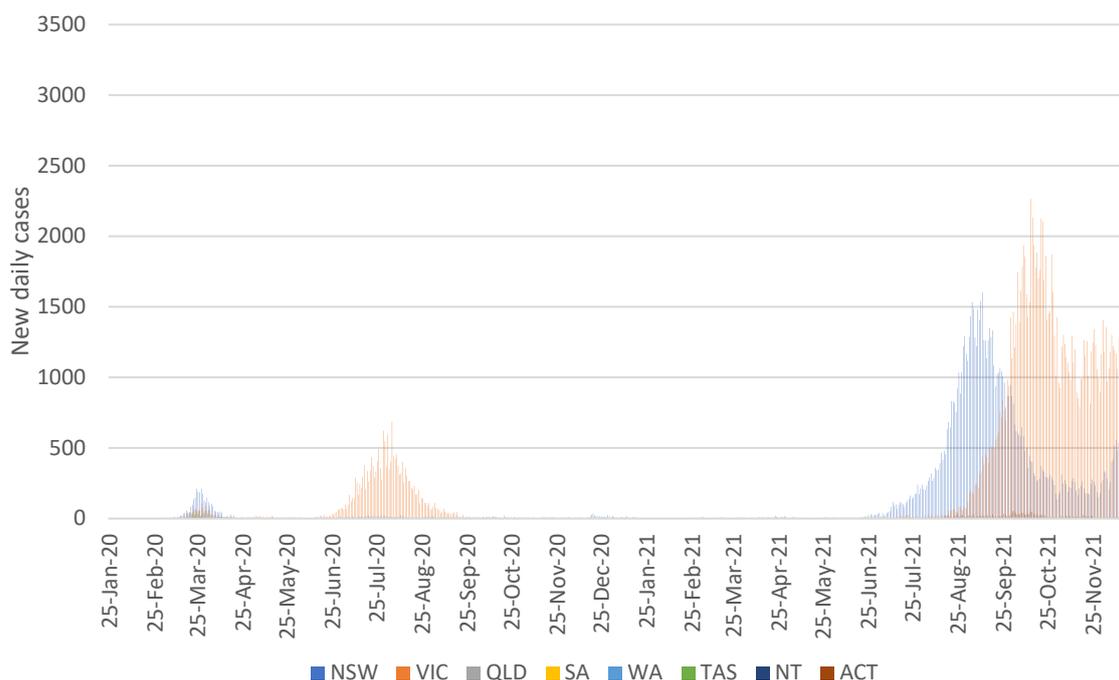
<sup>2</sup> Department of Health (2021), [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) current situation and case numbers](#), Commonwealth Government of Australia, 21 December.

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

<sup>4</sup> COVID-19 National Incident Room Surveillance Team (2021), [COVID-19, Australia: Epidemiology Report 56: Reporting fortnight ending 5 December 2021](#), Communicable Diseases Intelligence Volume 45, 20 December, p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> COVID-19 National Incident Room Surveillance Team (2021), [COVID-19, Australia: Epidemiology Report 56: Reporting fortnight ending 5 December 2021](#), Communicable Diseases Intelligence Volume 45, 20 December, p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> COVID-19 National Incident Room Surveillance Team (2021), [COVID-19, Australia: Epidemiology Report 56: Reporting fortnight ending 5 December 2021](#), Communicable Diseases Intelligence Volume 45, 20 December, p. 4.

**Chart 2: New daily confirmed COVID-19 cases in Australia, by 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.

Source: [COVID-19 in Australia](#), covid19data.com.au, 21 December 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.<sup>7</sup> 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 2021, there was a slight uptick in reported daily cases, predominately in Victoria and New South Wales. Daily new cases began to increase significantly in New South Wales from June 2021 and in Victoria from August 2021. New cases in New South Wales declined after mid-September 2021, and in Victoria after mid-October. However, both states have since experienced a significant increase in new cases in December, particularly in New South Wales.

## State outbreaks of COVID-19

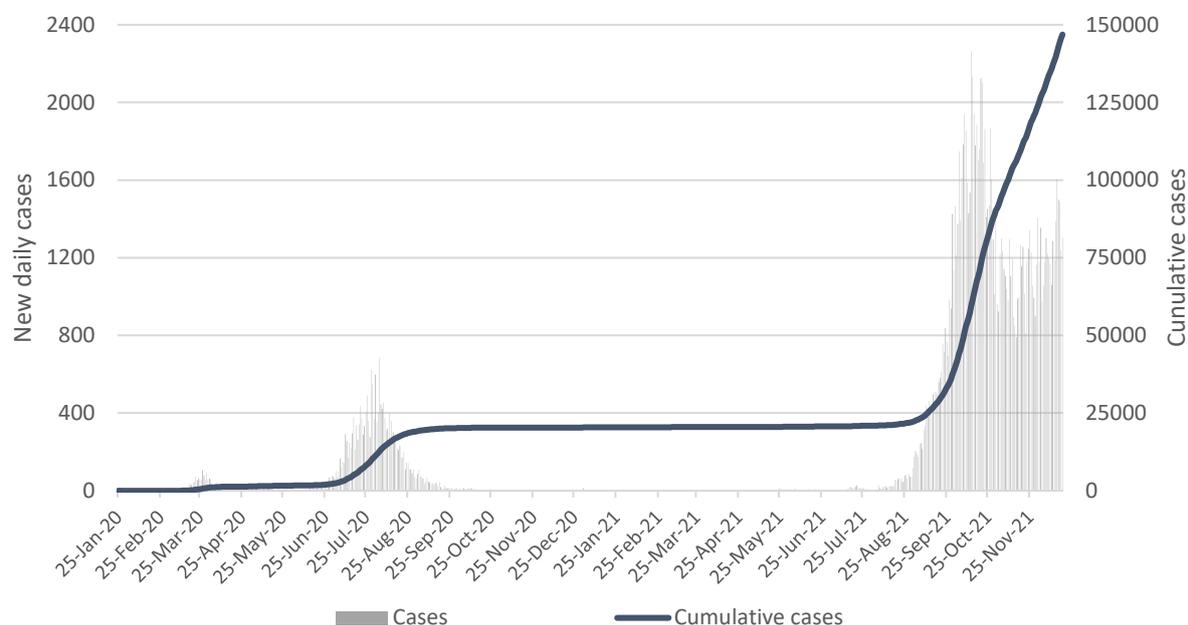
### Victoria

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

<sup>7</sup> 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.

until 25 May 2021, when new cases were reported. Daily new cases increased significantly at the start of September, reaching 2264 on 13 October 2021, before declining.

**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 21 December 2021.

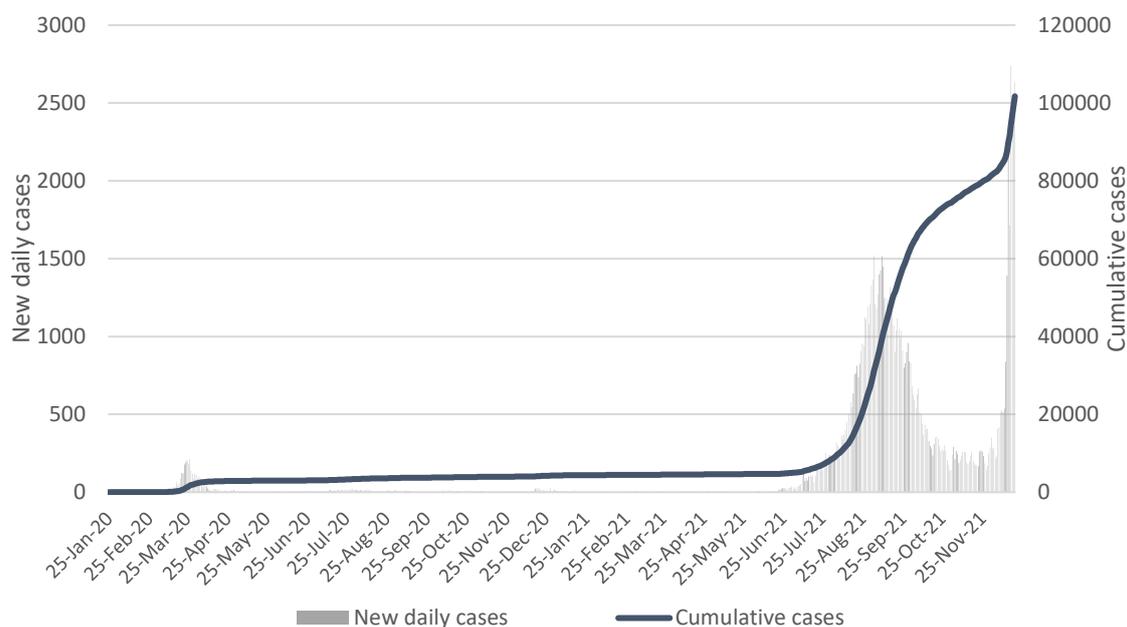
On 21 June 2020, the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) released a statement on recent outbreaks of COVID-19 in Victoria, noting that due to the continued growth in confirmed cases overseas and the number of Australians still overseas who may return; as well as sporadic community transmission in Australia, that it remains probable that Australia will experience periodic outbreaks.<sup>8</sup>

## New South Wales

Chart 4 shows the daily new cases and cumulative cases of COVID-19 recorded in NSW. It shows that although the number of cases was 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 increase in cases around December 2020 and January 2021.

New daily cases of COVID-19 in New South Wales significantly increased from late June 2021, and quickly surpassed the earlier peak in March 2020. Cases peaked at 1521 on 9 September 2021 before declining. However, the number of new cases increased significantly from early December and have since surpassed the previous peak, reaching 2739 on 17 December 2021.

<sup>8</sup> 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 21 December 2021.

## Other states/territories

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.<sup>9</sup> Cases fell below 5 per day from 18 November.<sup>10</sup>

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 8 cases on 21 July 2021. New cases increased from mid-December 2021, peaking at 154 cases on 21 December 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 from late June with a peak at 27 cases on 5 August 2021. New cases increased from mid-December, peaking at 86 cases on 21 December 2021.

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

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

## 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 were 8 new daily cases reported on 20 July 2021.

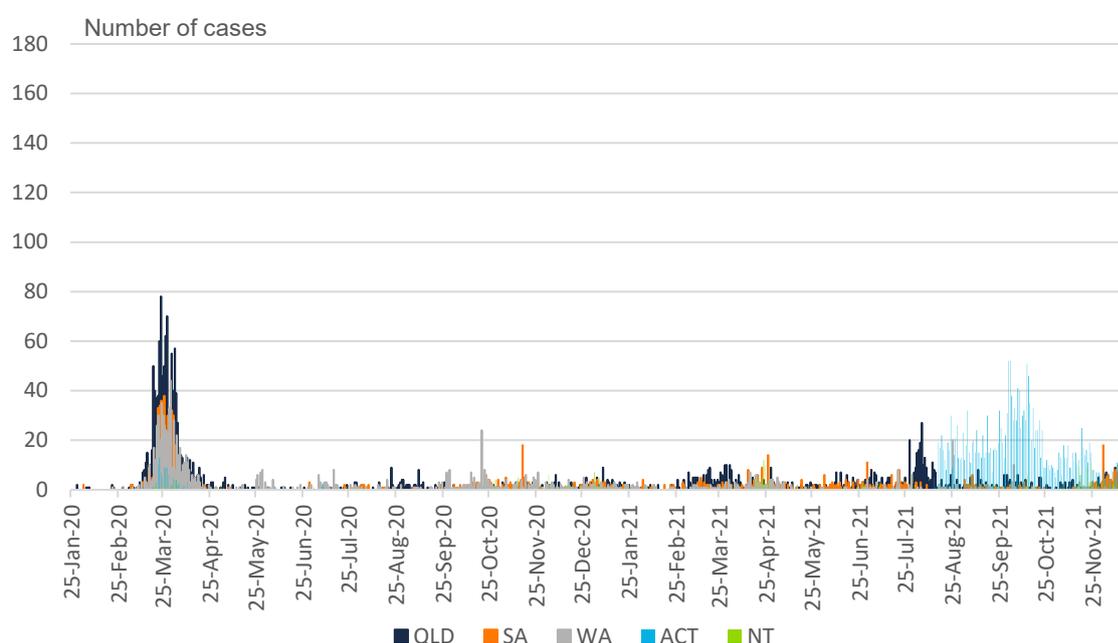
## Australian Capital Territory

New cases of COVID-19 were recorded in the ACT in August 2021, with a peak of 52 cases recorded on 1 October 2021.

## Northern Territory

New cases of COVID-19 were recorded in November 2021, peaking at 17 cases on 13 December 2021.

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



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](https://covid19data.com.au), covid19data.com.au, 21 December 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.<sup>11</sup>

Australia's COVID-19 vaccination rollout began on 22 February 2021.<sup>12</sup> 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

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

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

care and disability care staff and residents. Phase 1b<sup>13</sup> began on 22 March 2021,<sup>14</sup> 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 50 and 69 years; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people between 18 and 54 years; and other critical and high-risk workers. Phase 2b, of approximately 6.6 million people, was to vaccinate the remaining balance of the adult population. Finally, Phase 3 would vaccinate (if recommended) all people under 18 years (approximately 5.7 million people).<sup>15</sup> The initial timeline of the rollout was to offer a vaccine to all Australians by the end of October 2021.<sup>16</sup>

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

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 was the recommended vaccine for adults under 50 years.<sup>19</sup> 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.<sup>20</sup> 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.<sup>21</sup>

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 who were not already vaccinated. Additionally, access to the AstraZeneca vaccine for people eligible in phase 2a between 50 and 69 years was brought forward, beginning from 3 May 2021 for General

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

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

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

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

<sup>17</sup> Department of Health (2021), [Australia's vaccine agreements](#), updated 25 August.

<sup>18</sup> Hon. Hunt G (2021), [Greater access – additional 10 million Pfizer/BioNTech COVID-19 vaccines](#), 4 February.

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

<sup>20</sup> Prime Minister of Australia (2021), [National Cabinet Statement](#), 9 April.

<sup>21</sup> 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.<sup>22</sup>

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.<sup>23</sup> 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'.<sup>24</sup> 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'.<sup>25</sup>

On 17 June 2021, updated advice provided to the Australian Government was that the Pfizer vaccine is preferred for adults aged 59 years and under.<sup>26</sup>

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.<sup>27</sup> 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.<sup>28</sup>

[On 2 July 2021](#), National Cabinet released the *National Plan to transition Australia's National COVID Response* (National Plan).<sup>29</sup> 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;

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<sup>22</sup> Prime Minister of Australia (2021), [National Cabinet](#), 22 April.

<sup>23</sup> Prime Minister of Australia (2021), [Australia Secures Moderna Vaccines](#), 13 May.

<sup>24</sup> Australian Government (2021), [2021-22 Budget Strategy and Outlook, Budget Paper No. 1](#), 11 May, p. 36.

<sup>25</sup> Prime Minister of Australia (2021), [Interview with Leigh Sales, 7:30](#), 12 May.

<sup>26</sup> Hon. Hunt G (2021), [Updated ATAGI advice regarding AstraZeneca vaccine](#), 17 June.

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

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

<sup>29</sup> 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.

[On 30 July 2021, the Commonwealth Government announced](#) that National Cabinet agreed in-principle to an updated 4-step National Plan, taking account of modelling by the Doherty Institute and economic analysis by the Commonwealth Department of Treasury. Each phase will be triggered by the achievement of vaccination thresholds of both the nation, and the individual state or territory expressed as a percentage of the eligible population (16 years and over). The updated National Plan is the following:

- Phase A: vaccinate, prepare and pilot
  - Australia will continue to strongly suppress the virus for the purpose of minimising community transmission. Measures may include accelerating vaccination rates, closing international borders, and early, stringent and short lockdowns if outbreaks occur.
- Phase B: vaccination transition phase (~70 per cent of adult population fully vaccinated)
  - Australia will seek to minimise serious illness, hospitalisations and fatalities as a result of COVID-19 with low-level restrictions. Measures may include maintaining high vaccination rates, encouraging uptake through incentives and other measures, minimising cases in the community through ongoing low-level restrictions and effective track and trace, and with lockdowns unlikely but possible and targeted.
- Phase C: vaccination consolidation phase (≥80 per cent of adult population fully vaccinated)
  - Australia will seek to minimise serious illness, hospitalisations and fatalities as a result of COVID-19 with baseline restrictions. Measures may include maximising vaccination coverage, minimum ongoing baseline restrictions adjusted to minimise cases without lockdowns, and highly targeted lockdowns only.

[On 6 August 2021, further announced](#) that National Cabinet had fully agreed on the updated the National Plan.

[On 9 August 2021, the Commonwealth Government announced](#) that the TGA had given provisional approval for the use of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccination for Australians aged 18 years and over. The first doses are expected to be available from September 2021.

[On 19 August 2021, the Commonwealth Government announced](#) that Pfizer vaccines will be available to people aged between 16 and 39 years from 30 August 2021.

[On 28 October 2021, the Commonwealth Government announced](#) that booster shots will be available for those aged 50 years and over, residents of aged care and disability facilities, people with underlying medical conditions, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, and people at increased occupational risk of COVID-19) from 8 November 2021.

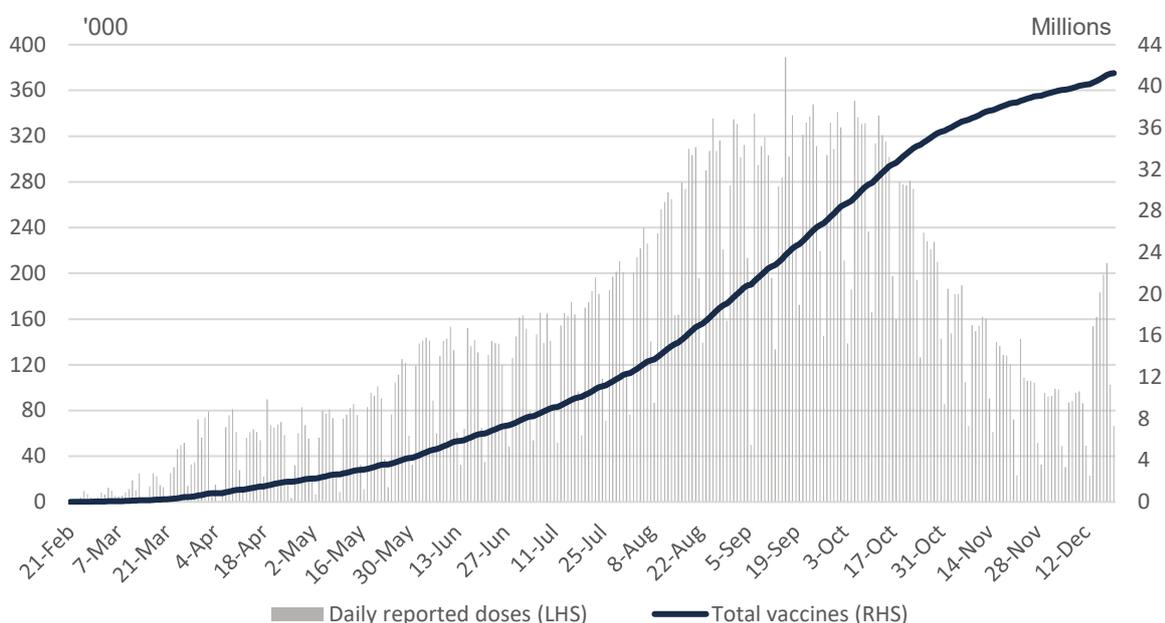
[On 10 December 2021, the Commonwealth Government announced](#) that the COVID-19 vaccination program will be extended to all children aged 5 to 11 years from 10 January 2022 after the Australian Government accepted recommendations from the ATAGI.

According to figures from the Commonwealth Department of Health, as at 20 December 2021:<sup>30</sup>

- 41 460 631 vaccine doses had been administered;
  - 93.9 per cent of the population aged 16 years and over had received 1 dose;
  - 90.6 per cent of the population aged 16 years and over had received 2 doses;
- New South Wales and Victoria have administered the most vaccine doses, with 13 389 445 and 11 076 979 doses, respectively; and
- Northern Territory and Tasmania have administered the least number of vaccine doses, with 410 089 and 910 583 doses, respectively.

Chart 5 shows the daily vaccination doses in Australia since 22 February 2021, as well as the cumulative total. It shows that the number of vaccination doses administered per day steadily increased from mid-May 2021. However, it has been declining since mid-October 2021 as most of the population has been fully vaccinated, although there was an increase in mid-December 2021.

**Chart 6: Daily and total vaccine doses administered**



Note: Data shown on date of announcement. Federal figures may be reported separately and not include all states. 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). These data should be read with caution.

Source: [COVID-19 in Australia](#), covid19data.com.au, 20 November 2021.

<sup>30</sup> Department of Health (2021), [Australia's COVID-19 vaccine rollout](#), updated 21 December.