(UPDATED MAY 2023)

**FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

**ABOUT COVID-19 VACCINATION**

**Can I receive the COVID-19 vaccine if I have rheumatic heart disease (RHD) or if I have had acute rheumatic fever (ARF) in the past?**

* Yes. COVID-19 vaccination is strongly recommended for people who have had ARF and for people who have RHD.

**How many COVID-19 vaccine doses do I need?**

* Most people should have had a first course of 2-3 vaccinations. Recommendations about the number of booster doses vary for different age and population groups. For updated information see [COVID-19 booster vaccine advice](https://www.health.gov.au/our-work/covid-19-vaccines/getting-your-vaccination/booster-doses).

**Can I receive the COVID-19 vaccine while I have ARF (illness)?**

* No. COVID-19 vaccination should be delayed until ARF symptoms have gone, and blood tests are back to normal. This may be a few weeks after you start to feel better. Being well with vaccination gives you the best chance of having a good response to the vaccine and minimises the risk of vaccine side effects.

**If I have RHD or if I have had ARF in the past, can I receive Pfizer and Moderna vaccines?**

* Yes. mRNA vaccines (Pfizer and Moderna) are considered safe and are recommended for people with RHD and for people who have had ARF in the past.

**Can I have the COVID-19 vaccine if I am pregnant?**

* Yes. COVID-19 vaccination is safe and recommended during pregnancy.

**Should children have COVID-19 vaccination, including if they have had ARF or have RHD?**

* Yes. All children aged 5 years and over, including children who have RHD and who have recovered from ARF should be vaccinated against COVID-19 according to the Australian guidelines.
* From September 2022, some children aged 6 months to 4 years who are severely immunocompromised, have a disability, or have complex and/or multiple health conditions will also be eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine.

**HOW TO AVOID COVID-19 INFECTION**

**1 Get VACCINATED**

* Vaccination is the most effective way of avoiding COVD-19. Vaccinated people who have the COVID-19 infection are less likely to get very sick and less likely to die from complications.

**2 Follow public health directions.**

* Wash your hands regularly with soap and water.
* Stay away from others if you are sick.
* Stay away from others if they are sick.
* Stay away from large crowds of people if COVID-19 is in the community.
* Wear a mask over your nose and mouth in crowded settings if COVID-19 is in the community.
* Keep a distance (at least 1.5m) from others so that if you cough, sneeze or blow your nose, you are not spreading germs on to them, and they are not spreading germs to you.
* If you cough or sneeze, turn away and cough/sneeze into your elbow.

**MANAGING COVID-19 INFECTION**

**Are people with RHD at increased risk of getting very sick from COVID-19?**

* Yes and no. Overall, having RHD does not increase the risk of more severe COVID-19.
* However, some people who are already very sick with RHD may get even sicker with COVID-19 infection. Having RHD and other health problems, can also increase the risk of getting very sick with COVID-19 for some people.

**Can COVID-19 infection be treated?**

* Mild symptoms can be treated at home with pain relief (e.g., paracetamol or ibuprofen), staying hydrated (drinking enough water), and resting. There are also several treatments available for people who need to be in hospital. See [COVID-19 treatments](https://www.health.gov.au/health-alerts/covid-19/treatments).

**VISITING THE HEALTH CENTRE/CLINIC**

* People who need treatment for other health conditions such as RHD should keep going to their health service or clinic. They should follow the rules about appointments and follow public health directions (above).
* If you are having penicillin injections, keep getting these when they are due (even if you get COVID-19 infection).
* Keep checking yourself for signs of Strep A infections – skin sores or a sore throat – and get treatment quickly.
* If you have a sore throat, get a COVID-19 swab AND get a Strep A throat swab.
* Keep checking yourself for signs of rheumatic fever like sore joints and get treatment quickly.
* Go to all other necessary health appointments at the clinic.
* Tell the clinic staff if you have any COVID-19 symptoms including fever, cough, sore throat, loss of taste or smell.

**STAYING STRONG**

See the [Stay Strong on Country](https://www.menzies.edu.au/resources/?keywords=coronavirus) COVID-19 messages.