

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

COVID-19 and COVID-19 vaccination for people with acute rheumatic fever or rheumatic heart disease

About COVID-19 vaccination

Can I receive the COVID-19 vaccine if I have rheumatic heart disease or if I have had acute rheumatic fever?

- Yes. COVID-19 vaccination is strongly recommended for people who have had acute rheumatic fever and for people who have rheumatic heart disease.

How many COVID-19 vaccine doses do I need?

- Most adults need two doses, then a booster after three to six months.
- Most children need two doses. (Children who have a severe immune suppression illness need three doses)
- Recommendations about the number of doses may change: for updated information, see [COVID-19 vaccine doses and administration](#).

Is having rheumatic heart disease a medical exemption to COVID-19 vaccination?

- No. Vaccination is recommended for people with rheumatic heart disease.

Is acute rheumatic fever a medical exemption to COVID vaccination?

- Yes. If you have acute rheumatic fever now or if you are recovering from acute rheumatic fever, you can apply for an exemption to delay vaccination. When you have recovered, vaccination is strongly recommended.
- See [ATAGI statement](#) on mRNA vaccines
- See [ATAGI Expanded Guidance on temporary medical exemptions for COVID-19 vaccines](#)

Can I receive the COVID-19 vaccine if I have acute rheumatic fever now?

- No. COVID-19 vaccination should be delayed until acute rheumatic fever 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 minimising risk of vaccine side effects.

If I had my first COVID-19 vaccine dose and rheumatic fever or another illness delays my second dose, do I need to start the vaccination course again?

- No. You do not need to start the vaccination course again - the second dose will still be effective even if you get it after the recommended time.
- See [ATAGI clinical guidance on replacement doses for invalid primary courses of COVID-19 vaccines](#)

Do people with rheumatic heart disease need four COVID-19 vaccine doses (like people on renal dialysis)?

- No. Rheumatic heart disease is a chronic illness, but it does not affect the immune system in the way some conditions like kidney failure or cancer treatment can. So, if you have rheumatic heart disease and / or acute rheumatic fever and you do NOT have another health condition like kidney failure, you just need two vaccine doses, and then a booster dose three to six months later (for adults).
- However, if you have rheumatic heart disease PLUS one or more of the conditions that affect the immune system, then you would need three vaccine doses, and then a booster dose six months later (for adults).
- See [ATAGI – Provider guide to COVID-19 vaccination of people with immunocompromise](#)

I have heard that mRNA vaccines like Pfizer and Moderna can cause heart problems. If I have rheumatic heart disease or if I have had acute rheumatic fever in the past, should I avoid these types of vaccines?

- No. mRNA vaccines (Pfizer and Moderna) are considered safe and are recommended for people with rheumatic heart disease and for people who have had acute rheumatic fever in the past.
- See [ATAGI statement](#) on mRNA vaccines
- See [RHDAustralia's recommendations for mRNA vaccines](#)

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

- Yes, COVID vaccination is safe and recommended in pregnancy

Should children have COVID-19 vaccination, including if they have had acute rheumatic fever or have rheumatic heart disease?

- Yes. All children, including children who have rheumatic heart disease and who have recovered from acute rheumatic fever and should be vaccinated according to the Australian guidelines.
- "Children aged 5-11 years with medical risk factors for severe illness, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and children living in crowded conditions or outbreak areas are most likely to benefit from COVID-19 vaccination given their increased risk of severe outcomes and/or exposure." (This also applies to children aged 12 years and over)
- See [ATAGI recommendations on Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine use in children aged 5 to 11 years](#)
- See [ATAGI recommendations on the use of COVID-19 vaccines in all young adolescents in Australia](#)

How to avoid COVID-19 infection

1 Get VACCINATED

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

2 Follow public health directions

- Wear a mask over your nose and mouth.
- 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.
- Keep a distance (at least 1.5 metres) from others so that if you cough, sneeze or blow your nose, you're 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.

COVID-19 infection

Am I at increased risk of getting very sick from COVID-19?

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

Can COVID-19 infection be treated?

- Yes. 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](#)



Visiting the health centre/clinic

People who need treatment 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 get 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 of your regular 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.

STAY STRONG

- See the [Stay strong on country](#) messages in Aboriginal languages.

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Updated 24 February 2022