



## POSITION STATEMENT

# Coronavirus (COVID-19) vaccinations

## Our position

The Leukaemia Foundation encourages anyone who is eligible to receive a vaccine for COVID-19 to do so. Vaccination protects you from getting seriously ill and reduces your risk of needing to go to the hospital as a result of getting COVID-19 and can help reduce transmission of the virus.

People who are immunocompromised, or have other underlying health conditions, should seek advice from their treatment team or haematologist about what vaccinations they may need and should have.



**Alignment with Patient First Strategy Pillar:**  
*Improve the experience for all those affected by blood cancer*

## What we do

The Leukaemia Foundation is the Australian charity stopping blood cancer from wrecking lives.

We exist for every Australian affected by any type of blood cancer, including leukaemia, lymphoma and myeloma.

The Leukaemia Foundation offers expert support, funds leading-edge research and campaigns to make change for Australians facing blood cancer.

Our goal is zero lives lost to blood cancer by 2035.

Our values power our purpose and drive us toward our goal: we care deeply, we're bold, and we always step up and make it count for people living with blood cancer.

## Why we do it

Your blood is a remarkable thing. It keeps you alive by giving your body what it needs, taking away what it doesn't and fighting off infection.

Blood cancer stops your blood from doing what it needs to keep you alive and healthy.

It develops in the places of your body where blood is made, but its exact cause is unknown.

Another 53 Australians are diagnosed with blood cancer each day, joining more than 135,000 people living with the devastating impact of our second most diagnosed cancer.

A range of things affect someone's chance of surviving blood cancer and it can be incurable. Sadly, another 16 Australians will lose their life to blood cancer each and every day.

# Frequently asked questions

## **Are people with blood cancer more at risk?**

Older people and those with cancer, including blood cancer, are more likely to develop serious illness. The best way to protect yourself and others around you is to be well informed about the disease and how the virus spreads.

If you're receiving cancer treatment that suppresses your immune system and you develop a fever or respiratory symptoms, call a member of your treatment team as you usually would if you developed a fever.

## **What does 'immunocompromised' mean and is the vaccine still effective?**

Being immunocompromised means having a weakened immune system due to a medical condition or treatment. Many conditions can cause immunocompromise, including:

- cancer, especially blood cancer
- treatments for cancer (e.g., chemotherapy, targeted therapies, radiotherapy, and CAR-T cell therapy)
- having a bone marrow or stem cell transplant.

People who are immunocompromised can have reduced responses to vaccines, meaning they may not be as well protected as people whose immune system is normal. However, as there are a lot of risks identified with COVID-19, immunocompromised people should still get vaccinated as soon as possible.

As people with blood cancer may have reduced immune responses to the COVID-19 vaccine, it's strongly recommended their family and carers should be vaccinated as soon as possible, too. This may provide an additional level of protection for people with blood cancer.

Most people will need to continue their treatment before and after vaccination, but you should discuss the best timing of vaccination with your treatment team.

If you can be vaccinated, you should have a COVID-19 vaccine if you're aged five and over and are immunocompromised or are taking immune-weakening treatments.

## **What about booster doses?**

In 2022, immunocompromised people aged 16 and over who had received three primary doses of vaccination were recommended to receive a booster or fourth dose three months after their third primary dose.

*In 2022, the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) - who advise the Minister for Health on the medical administration of vaccines available in Australia, including those available through the National Immunisation Program (NIP) - recommended an additional booster dose of the COVID-19 vaccine to increase vaccine protection before winter for selected groups. If you're 16 or over and have had a three primary doses of the vaccine due to immunocompromise, it's now recommended you receive a booster or fourth dose at three months after your third primary dose.*

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For people who are not immunocompromised, a booster dose is recommended for everyone aged 16 and over if it's been three months since your second primary dose.

A booster dose increases your protection against:

1. infection with the virus that causes COVID-19
2. severe disease
3. dying from COVID-19.

**ATAGI  
recommendations for  
vaccine types**

Criteria	Pfizer	Moderna	AstraZeneca	Novavax
Approved aged group	5+	12+	18+	18+
Primary course	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Third dose for immunocompromised people	Yes	Yes	Not preferred [1]	Yes
Booster dose	Yes	18+	Not preferred [1]	No

[1] AstraZeneca can be given as a booster dose in some circumstances

[2] Nuvaxovid (Novavax) can be used if no other COVID-19 vaccine is considered suitable for that person

**What is the Leukaemia  
Foundation doing?**

We're helping to fund the SerOzNET trial which is assessing responses to COVID-19 vaccinations in adults with cancer, including blood cancer.

We're closely monitoring the situation and continuing to speak with the clinical community, many of whom are on the [Blood Cancer Taskforce](#). We'll ensure any new advice or guidance is provided to people living with blood cancer through our information channels.

**New medications to  
treat COVID-19**

There are several new medications available to help treat COVID-19 in adolescents and adults. They include:

- Evusheld - prevent and treat COVID-19 (aged 12 years and over)
- Sotrovimab (Xevudy) – used within the first five days of symptoms for those with mild to moderate COVID-19 (aged 12 years and over)
- Remdesivir – used within the first seven days of symptoms (adults)
- Molnupiravir – oral antiviral tablet for use in the first five days of symptoms (aged 12 years and over)
- Paxlovid – oral antiviral tablet approved for use in the first five days of symptoms (aged 18 years and over)

**Please talk to your treatment team about medications that are right for you.**

**COVID-19 Action plan –  
What to do if you have  
blood cancer and test  
positive for COVID-19**

If you test positive to COVID-19, contact your treatment team. They will consider several factors to help decide if your cancer treatment should be interrupted or changed and how your COVID-19 care should be managed. These may include the following things:

- whether your COVID-19 symptoms are mild or severe
- your vaccine status – how many vaccinations you have had and how long it been since your last vaccination
- how suppressed (low) your immune system is
- the type of cancer treatment you are having
- some studies show that chemotherapy may be associated with worse outcomes from COVID-19 infection than some other treatments, such as immunotherapy and hormone-blocking (endocrine) therapy.
- the stage of cancer you have and where you are in your treatment regimen
- you may have other underlying health conditions, such as diabetes and high blood pressure.

**Vaccination and  
children**

Vaccinating children can help prevent children from passing the virus onto younger siblings, grandparents and the wider community. Everyone 5 years and over can now book an appointment for a COVID-19 vaccine with vaccinations available from 10th January 2022. More information is available [here](#).

## More information on blood cancer and COVID-19

More information on blood cancer and COVID-19 is available [here](#).

## More questions? Get in touch

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