



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS COVID-19 Vaccinations (15.12.2021)

GENERAL

Why are we implementing the policy?

The health and safety of our people and the people we serve is central to our call as a church and our responsibility as an employer.

The Synod recognises its role under the Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (Qld) and the requirements under D1.1 Synod Wide WHS Framework. We are committed to providing a healthy and safe working environment so far as is reasonably practicable for all workers regardless of placement or position. The Synod also recognises its responsibilities to provide a safe environment for the people we serve, particularly those who may be particularly vulnerable.

Studies have found that COVID-19 vaccination limits COVID-19 infections through reduced transmission and reduces the likelihood of severe disease, including death. Widespread COVID-19 vaccination will assist in preventing the virus from spreading throughout our community and protect those who are most vulnerable if infected. The COVID-19 virus poses a significant risk to the community generally, and the Delta variant, in particular, affects all age groups, so health status does not provide substantial benefit in preventing serious illness or death.

The Synod Standing Committee resolution to require vaccinations of all people exercising a ministry role in the Queensland Synod and all Office of the Synod staff and staff of Synod office enterprises COVID-19 vaccination policy has been made in recognition of the health and safety risks posed by the COVID-19 virus, our WHS obligations in this context, and our call to love and care for our neighbour.

The requirement for vaccinations of all 'workers' at an early learning setting (including employees, family day care educators, in home care contractors, volunteers/parents involved in support work or activities, students, allied health professionals supporting a child and people who are engaged through a contract for the supply of services such as cleaning, gardening, plumber, electrician) is necessary to remain consistent with Government Requirements in the early learning space and to provide the safest possible place for the children and families that we serve.

What are the Work Health and Safety (WHS) obligations that relate to COVID-19?

WHS legislation places a primary duty of care on all those conducting a business to eliminate or, if not possible, minimise, so far as is reasonably practicable, the risk of exposure to COVID-19 in the workplace. The Synod recognises its role as a person conducting a business or undertaking (PCBU) under the Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (Qld) and the requirements under D1.1 Synod Wide WHS Framework.

This duty includes implementing effective control measures within the workplace to eliminate or minimise the impact of COVID-19 on our people and others in our workplaces. COVID-19 vaccination is a risk mitigation measure that has proven effective against the implications of COVID-19.



A risk assessment has been undertaken to consider the risks of the COVID-19 virus and the benefits of requiring vaccination to ensure we are implementing control measures to reduce the risk of COVID-19 within our workplaces, including where our employees work from home.

Who has been consulted about this policy?

Consultations were undertaken with our people identified in our risk assessment as having the most significant exposure to the COVID-19 virus. Consideration was also given to the nature of the risk and level of exposure in the context of the UC Centre working from home and the enterprises of the Office of the Synod.

Our Covid Team have engaged with Covid Advisors at each congregation and a wide range of people across the life of the Church to respond to specific requests and concerns and maintain a dialogue throughout the pandemic.

We have informed employees of the workplace change as a result of the decision of the Synod Standing Committee and subsequent approval of a COVID-19 Vaccination policy and procedure. The Synod has also provided information on how an individual may mitigate the impact of the change through requesting an exemption from the requirement to be fully vaccinated.

In the case of an early learning setting, a public health direction requires both the employer and workers to comply with the direction.

TO WHOM DOES THE POLICY APPLY?

Who is required to be vaccinated against COVID-19?

The Policy applies to:

- employees of the Queensland Office of the Synod staff
- people who are engaged through a contract for the supply of services to the Office of the Synod,
- workers at an early learning site,
- ministry agents, and
- people in supply ministry.

The policy does not apply to:

- volunteers of the Queensland Office of the Synod (other than a volunteer at an early learning site),
- laypersons employed in ministry locations, designated as appropriate for the exercise of the ministry of pastor, or
- people who supply site maintenance or cleaning services under a contract to supply services to the Synod office (other than at an early learning site).

Who are employees of the Office of the Synod?

An employee is any person employed by way of a contract of employment by The Uniting Church in Australia Property Trust (Q.) represented by The Queensland Synod (ABN 25 548 385 225), including full-time, part-time, casual employees, and fixed-term employees.



Who are ministry agents?

The term ministry agent includes Uniting Church in Australia candidates, community ministers, deacons, deaconesses, interns, lay pastors, ministers of the word, pastors, youth workers and ministers from other denominations serving in approved placements in the Queensland Synod.

What is an early learning site?

Early learning sites include centre-based childcare, family day care, in home care and outside school hours care services, and the early learning operations team of the Office of the Synod.

Who are workers at an early learning site?

Anyone who works in or undertakes an educational placement in or volunteers at an early learning site, including:

- employees
- family day care educators
- in home contractors
- people engaged through a contract for the supply of services such as plumbing, electrical, cleaning, gardening and building services
- volunteers who assist in delivering support activities and services (such as a parent, guardian, indigenous elder)
- chaplains or support workers
- university students on practical placement
- psychologists or therapists providing support for individuals

Am I required to be vaccinated if I am an In Home Care Contractor?

Based on all available information, our current position is that In Home Care Contractors are covered by the Government Requirement and, therefore, our policy. If the situation changes and In Home Care Contractors are not covered by the Government Regulation, we will provide an update immediately, and any record held by the Synod regarding vaccination or an exemption will be deleted from our secure storage location.

MEETING THE REQUIREMENTS

How can I access a vaccine?

You can arrange to be vaccinated through GP and Pharmacy clinics and may be able to access a walk-in appointment at selected locations.

You can call your GP, book your [vaccination online](#) or visit one of the [Queensland Health walk-in clinics located across Queensland](#).



How do I provide evidence of my vaccination status?

Please submit evidence of your vaccination status on the 'Proof of Vaccination Form' under 'Submit your vaccination evidence' on the [webpage](#).

Evidence of your vaccination is provided by an immunisation history statement showing the required COVID-19 doses (including boosters) available from the Australian Government:

- an immunisation history statement from the Australian Immunisation Register (call 1800 653 809)
- a COVID-19 digital certificate (available on a Medicare account via MyGov)
- a COVID-19 vaccination appointment card (provided at Queensland Health vaccination locations when a person receives their first dose)
- an immunisation history statement (from a regular healthcare provider or MyGov)

For people who received their vaccination overseas, evidence would be provided in the form of an International COVID-19 Vaccination Certificate for overseas travel.

Submit your evidence as soon as possible. All evidence must be provided by:

- 17 December 2021 for the first dose of a COVID-19 vaccine for an early learning site
- 11:59 pm on 23 January 2022 for the second dose of a COVID-19 vaccine for an early learning site
- 1 February 2022 in all other cases

Is my Privacy Protected?

It is essential that your information and any record we create is used and stored in a way that keeps it secure and confidential. All information must be stored in a secure database accessible to authorised persons only. All personal and health information collected during this process will be collected and handled in accordance with the Privacy Act 1988.

The information provided by you will be securely stored in a database that is only accessible by authorised Office of the Synod employees. The list of authorised employees is limited to specific people in People and Culture or in our Information Technology team. In addition, the email address of vaccines@ucaqld.com.au is only accessible by the same authorised employees.

A confidentiality clause binds all Office of the Synod employees in their employment contract, which provides clear direction to what information cannot be disclosed. This is in addition to the Synod's Privacy policy which ensures compliance with the Privacy Act 1988.

Any information you disclose may be used only to ensure compliance with the [COVID-19 Vaccination policy and procedure \(D2.1.1\)](#) for rostering or planning purposes. Your vaccination certificate or any documentary evidence you provide to support an exemption application will not be shared with others.

You will be required to provide your consent for the Office of the Synod to collect and store your information when you provide evidence of your vaccination or when making an application for an exemption.



Will I be able to attend a vaccination appointment during work time?

If attending a vaccination appointment/hub during work hours is most convenient for you, please speak with your manager to discuss how this can be accommodated. It is important that employees talk with their manager first to see if appointments can fit in with rostering and other working arrangements to ensure those we serve are not detrimentally affected by any planned absences.

Ministers should consider the most appropriate time given their ministry duties and/or schedule.

Can I take paid time off if I feel unwell after being vaccinated?

Full-time and part-time employees can use paid personal/carers leave if they cannot work because they are unwell after being vaccinated. If a full-time or part-time employee runs out of paid personal leave entitlements, they may be able to access other paid leave entitlements, like annual leave, or make other arrangements by agreement with their manager.

Ministers will continue to receive their stipend and allowances if they cannot undertake their ministry duties because they are unwell after being vaccinated. A Sickness and Accident Assistance Plan application may be submitted if the period exceeds the qualification period.

A leave policy for COVID-19 vaccinations for UEEL staff was implemented earlier this year, which will be expiring on 31 December 2021. It provides for a day of paid leave for each vaccination dose, including boosters. It can be used if you need to give up a shift to get vaccinated or if you feel unwell after receiving the vaccination (but not both). If an employee receives a vaccination on a day when they do not have a shift, they can be paid the leave allowance for that day. The payment is based on the average hours per day worked during the pay period in which the vaccination was received. For UEEL permanent employees, they can access sick leave for the second and any subsequent days they are unwell.

Can I wait until the Novavax vaccine is available?

Novavax is not an approved vaccine. Any approval is unlikely until early 2022. All employees must provide proof of their COVID-19 vaccination by February 1st. Early Learning workers must provide proof of the first dose by December 17 and full vaccination by the 23rd January.

If you choose to delay vaccination, you will not meet the requirement of the Policy.

What happens if an individual within the scope of the policy has received the first dose of a vaccine but will not receive the second dose in time to comply with the requirement?

If an individual has received one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine, it is essential that they receive a second dose as per the recommended dosage schedule for the vaccine. This can vary from 3 weeks apart up to 12 weeks apart. If an individual cannot receive the second dose before the required due date, they will need to consider completing an exemption application form.

What if an employee or minister is on leave when the policy comes into effect?

An employee or minister must still submit their vaccination evidence by the due date or apply for an exemption by the due date. All applications for an exemption will be considered on a case-by-case basis



and against criteria outlined in the [COVID-19 Vaccination procedure](#). If an application is approved, it may be permanent, temporary and/or have conditions. For example, an exemption may be approved for an employee to provide their vaccination evidence before returning to the workplace. Still, it may have a condition that the employee cannot visit any workplace, including a designated workplace at a colleague's home.

What happens to those who remain unvaccinated or do not provide evidence of vaccination?

If a person is unvaccinated and has an approved exemption, the exemption may have conditions. For example, to accord with the public health direction, a worker in an early learning setting who is unvaccinated due to a medical contraindication must use personal protective equipment (PPE) such as a mask when at work and must produce a negative COVID-19 PCR test result each day before the start of the shift.

A refusal or failure to be vaccinated and provide evidence of vaccination in the absence of an approved exemption may lead to consequences, including:

- imposition of conditions of entry to a workplace,
- denial of admission to a workplace
- termination of volunteer work
- stand down with pay (for a short duration to consider the consequences)
- termination of a contract for the supply of service
- termination of employment
- termination of placement.

For more detail, please see 3.1 of the [COVID-19 Vaccination Procedure](#).

What arrangements will be made for those who do not want to receive the vaccine while pregnant or breastfeeding?

Medical advice strongly recommends the COVID-19 vaccine for people who are pregnant or breastfeeding. Pregnant individuals are particularly vulnerable to COVID-19 and are now considered a priority group for vaccination. Vaccination reduces the risk of severe disease during pregnancy and will help to protect both the mother and baby from the virus.

Given that the COVID-19 vaccine is strongly recommended for pregnant and breastfeeding persons, pregnancy and breastfeeding are not recognised as medical contraindications (unless other circumstances apply) and thus may not be considered exceptional circumstances for an exemption requirement to be vaccinated applies.

Where a pregnant or breastfeeding person has made a personal choice not to be vaccinated, the person must complete an exemption application. The application will be considered on a case-by-case basis and against criteria outlined in the [COVID-19 Vaccination procedure](#).



EXEMPTIONS

How could an individual apply for an exemption from the requirements outlined in the policy?

A [COVID-19 Vaccine Exemption Application form \(D2.1.1.1\)](#) must be used by a person seeking an exemption from the requirements of the COVID-19 Vaccination policy. Supporting evidence must be provided.

An exemption is only possible:

- where the person has a recognised medical contradiction to the COVID-19 vaccine
- where the person has refused the COVID-19 vaccine on the grounds of a genuinely held religious belief, or
- where there is an exceptional circumstance.

Exemptions will be considered in accordance with the [COVID-19 Vaccination procedure](#); however, 'vaccine hesitancy' and other non-medical objections may not be considered sufficiently exceptional to justify an exemption in the circumstances. Any requests for exemption will be assessed on a case-by-case basis. Approval may be permanent, temporary and/or conditional.

The new Covid vaccination page on our website, [COVID-19 Vaccination - Uniting Church in Australia, Queensland Synod \(ucaql.com.au\)](#), contains instructions to submit an exemption application form and supporting evidence.

For more, refer to [COVID-19 Vaccination procedure section 4](#).

ABOUT THE VACCINE

What should individuals do if they have questions or concerns concerning various COVID-19 vaccines?

Additional information concerning the safety, effectiveness and development of the COVID-19 vaccine is available on the [Queensland Health](#) and [Commonwealth Department of Health](#) websites.

Individuals should discuss any concerns specific to their circumstances or medical history with their health provider or other treating medical specialists.

Read more information on the COVID-19 vaccination research [here](#)

Have the vaccines been appropriately reviewed by regulatory agencies?

All vaccines available in Australia are approved by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) for safety, quality and effectiveness. Vaccine scientists worldwide are working together to ensure that rigorous processes are followed, and no testing or ethical approvals have been bypassed. COVID-19 vaccines must meet the same high standards as any other vaccine approved for use in Australia. Find out [more here](#).