



Dental Assistants and trainees and COVID-19 vaccination: Position statement

The Dental Assistants Professional Association, as a membership body actively representing dental assistants, receptionists and practice managers across Australia, provides the following guidance to dental assistants and trainees as the COVID-19 situation continues to evolve.

In general the Dental Assistants Professional Association:

- supports mandatory COVID-19 vaccination (using a vaccine approved by the Therapeutic Goods Administration) for healthcare workers, including dental assistants and trainees undertaking patient facing roles as an appropriate public health and safety matter; and
- highlights the potential benefits of widespread vaccination in the community generally and specifically amongst healthcare workers who, because of their work, are at greater risk of contracting COVID-19

Further, the Dental Assistants Professional Association believes that vaccination is a crucial part of the public health response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Many registered health practitioners will have a vital role in COVID-19 vaccination programs and in educating the public about the importance and safety of COVID-19 vaccines to ensure high participation rates.

On 1 October 2021, Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) recommended mandatory vaccinations for all workers in health care settings as a condition of work. Further, AHPPC recommends the first dose of a TGA approved COVID-19 vaccine by 30 October 2021 and a second dose by 15 December 2021. <https://www.health.gov.au/news/australian-health-protection-principal-committee-ahppc-statement-on-mandatory-vaccination-of-all-workers-in-health-care-settings>

As health practitioners, staff and students are members of the general community, vaccination will contribute to achieving the highest possible level of immunity across the community, and will provide practitioners, staff and students with a level of protection for their own health if exposed to the novel coronavirus that causes COVID-19.

Consistent with the advice issued by the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency, the Dental Assistants Professional Association believes that where a dental assistant or trainee possesses a conscientious objection about COVID-19 vaccination, that individual must inform their employer and/or other relevant colleagues (where necessary) of their objection as soon as reasonably practical. Further they must comply with local employer, health service or health department policies, procedures and guidelines relating to COVID-19 vaccination.

The Dental Assistants Professional Association recognises that an individual may have legitimate personal beliefs and concerns regarding vaccination, and would encourage such individuals to take reasonable steps to obtain counselling, support and where necessary appropriate professional advice.

Is there a mandate for dental assistants to get vaccinated?

The Federal Government has continued to publicly state the vaccine will be voluntary, universal, and free and that if you choose not to have a COVID-19 vaccine your eligibility for Government payments won't be affected.

However, Australia's National Cabinet has mandated COVID-19 vaccinations for all residential aged care workers as a condition of working in a residential aged care facility.

Some State and Territory governments have issued public health orders mandating:

- COVID-19 vaccines for all healthcare workers to ensure the safety of patients and other workers. (noting that In some cases dental assistants and trainees are not included within those orders); and
- Vaccination for other workers in specified occupations deemed to be high risk of COVID-19 transmission such as disability support, border and quarantine, aviation, and early childhood education. (See jurisdiction links below).

As an example the Public Health (COVID-19 Vaccination of Health Care Workers) Order 2021 (NSW) some trainees may in fact be subject to this order. This may arise where the person is employed by a 'public health organisation', or an NGO that is funded to provide healthcare services by the state. For example a trainee at a 'dental school' such as Westmead or others would be covered.

Please note the following:

Any advice would need to be separated between the type of business that the DA is employed by in that:

- A. Employees of public health services or funded NGOs would need to comply with the obligations outlined in the direction. These employees will be covered by a state-based enterprise agreement (EA) and you will need to consider whether it, or the state itself, provides any form of leave for people who are either unvaccinated (or unable to be vaccinated)
- B. Those individuals employed by other business types would need to understand that the employer could in effect introduce a policy mandating vaccination. That mandate would most likely be implemented under the auspices of a '*reasonable and lawful direction*' made under the Work Health Safety legislation. The basis being that the requirement is necessary to promote health and safety / avoid undue risk.

For that reason any policy would need to consider:

1. Medical Exemptions (including prior infection that would prevent vaccination)
2. Individual Personal factors
3. A process to consult and rate risk relevant to the individual and their roles; and
4. The reasonable timeline to achieve compliance.

Evidence of vaccination or exemption

A worker may be asked to produce evidence of their vaccination status by their employer or the occupier of a premise or the approved provider of education and care service. Evidence of vaccination includes your:

- online [immunisation history statement](#)
- COVID-19 digital certificate via the Service. NSW app

- COVID-19 digital certificate via the [Australian Immunisation Register](#)
- medical contraindication certificate
- medical clearance form.

Evidence of your [medical exemption](#) must be from a medical practitioner in the form approved by the State or Territory Chief Health Officer.

National public health information about COVID-19 and vaccination

www.health.gov.au is the official site for the latest information on the novel coronavirus pandemic.

Information about national vaccination policy is available from: *Commonwealth Department of Health (2020). Australian COVID-19 Vaccination Policy*. See: www.health.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/covid-19-vaccines/about-covid-19-vaccines/australias-covid-19-vaccination-policy.

Information about the COVID-19 vaccination training program is available on the Department of Health website. See: www.health.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/covid-19-vaccines/covid-19-vaccination-training-program

The Therapeutic Goods Administration website provides valuable information on COVID-19 vaccines, including information about advertising COVID-19 vaccines. See: www.tga.gov.au/covid-19-vaccines.

State and Territory information on COVID-19 and vaccination:

Jurisdiction	Web link
Australian Capital Territory	www.covid19.act.gov.au/vaccine .
New South Wales	www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/covid-19/Pages/covid-vaccination.aspx
Northern Territory	coronavirus.nt.gov.au/
Queensland	www.health.qld.gov.au
South Australia	www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/public+content/sa+health+internet/conditions/infectious+diseases/covid-19/vaccine/covid-19+vaccinations
Tasmania	www.coronavirus.tas.gov.au/vaccination-information/covid-19-vaccination
Victoria	www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/vaccine
Western Australia	ww2.health.wa.gov.au/Articles/A_E/Coronavirus/COVID19-vaccination-program

*current as at 25 October 2021