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| Supporting COVID-19 vaccination for children and young people in care |
| Information for care services  **11 October 2021** |
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This guidance supports care services (out-of-home care) staff, carers, child protection and care teams to understand important information about COVID-19 vaccination eligibility and the provision of consent for children or young people in care. This includes eligible children and young people in kinship care, foster care, lead tenant, residential care and pre-final order permanent care.

COVID-19 vaccines are now available for all people aged 12 years and over in Victoria. Vaccination is safe, effective and free. Vaccination is the most effective step we can take to help keep our children and young people and their carers safe and better protected from contracting or spreading COVID-19 infection that can lead to serious illness or hospitalisation.

At the same time, staying the course and following all the health directions is critical to keeping everyone in the community safe.

## Are children and young people eligible for the vaccine?

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| **Children or young people aged between 12 and 17 years** | **Yes.** All children and young people aged between 12 years and 17 years of age are now eligible to receive safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines and will be offered either Pfizer or Moderna. This includes children and young people being looked after in care. |
| **Children aged under 12 years** | **No.** However, vaccine eligibility may change over time, and advice will be updated accordingly. |

## Authorisation for COVID 19 vaccination for children and young people in care

Under section 175A of the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* (the Act), the Secretary may specify issues relating to a child in out-of-home care about which a person who has care of the child may be authorised to make decisions, which includes decisions about routine medical care.

Carers may also be authorised to make certain decisions about children placed in their care, such as routine medical care.

Immunisations, inclusive of the COVID-19 vaccine, are considered routine medical care.

To streamline authorisations in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and to keep children and young people in care safe, the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing is amending the current policy to enable residential care, contracted kinship care and lead tenant providers to be authorised to make decisions in relation to routine medical care inclusive of COVID-19 vaccination.

Note that this authorisation is already in place for services providing foster care and prospective permanent care.

### Authorising a person who has care of a child to make decisions

Relevant service providers are currently able to issue a standard authorisation to foster carers and prospective permanent carers to make decisions in respect of specified issues. These issues include but are not limited to routine medical care, which includes immunisations.

To support the current immunisation of eligible young people, persons in charge of an out of home care service including residential care and contracted kinship care service providers will be authorised to make decisions about that child in relation to vaccination for COVID-19 as a specified issue. In turn, in accordance with section 175B (2) of the Act, the person in charge of these services may authorise a residential carer, no lower in level than the House Supervisor or team leader; a person who has care of the child to make decisions in relation to issues specified by the Secretary under section 175A.

For lead tenant, the Chief Executive Officer as the person in charge of the service is authorised to make decisions in relation to a child or young person in their care in relation to vaccination for COVID-19 as a specified issue. For lead tenant, the volunteer lead tenant carer will not be authorised to make this decision.

Details of the specified issue are included in the letter to your organisation from the Executive Director, Children and Families Policy, Children, Families, Communities and Disability Division dated October 2021.

A standard instrument of authorisation template has also been developed to assist residential care and contracted kinship care providers in administering the authorisation to a person who has care of the child and can be signed by the person in charge or the service. This authority cannot be delegated.

The authorisation by care type is summarised in the table below:

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| **Care type** | **Authorisation** |
| Kinship care | A person in charge of an out of home care service delivering contracted kinship care may authorise kinship carers to make decisions about a vaccination for COVID-19.  Kinship carers managed by child protection or an Authorised Aboriginal agency require a **child-specific** authorisation. |
| Foster care | If the carer has been issued with a **standard authorisation** by the CEO (or equivalent) of their care services provider which includes routine medical care in relation to children or young people they care for, they can provide consent for vaccination.  Alternatively, if the carer has been issued with **child specific carer authorisation** by Child Protection (as the case planner) that includes routine medical care decisions for a particular child or young person, they can provide consent for vaccination. |
| Lead tenant | A person in charge of an out of home care service delivering lead tenant may make decisions in relation to that child for a vaccination for COVID-19. |
| Residential care | A person in charge of an out of home care service delivering residential care may provide consent for routine medical care and may authorise a person who has care of the child (though not below the level of House Supervisor/ Team Leader) to make decisions in relation to that child for a vaccination for COVID-19. |
| Pre-final order permanent care | If the carer has been issued with **standard authorisation** by the CEO (or equivalent) of their care services provider which includes routine medical care they can provide consent to the COVID-19 vaccination.  Alternatively, if the carer has been issued with **child specific carer authorisation** by Child Protection (as the case planner) that includes routine medical care decisions for a particular child or young person, they can provide consent for vaccination. |

## Can a young person provide consent?

**Sometimes.** If a young person aged 12 to 17 years is deemed to be a mature minor by a senior and experienced immuniser. This means the health professional assesses that the young person understands the information relevant to the decision to be vaccinated and the effect of that decision.

it is recommended the young person attends a vaccination centre, in COVID safe ways, accompanied by one carer or staff member.

## Consultation with parents

Parents must be consulted for children and young people subject to an Interim Accommodation Order, Family Reunification Order or Therapeutic Placement Order.

To the fullest extent possible, parents must be engaged in respect of a child or young person intended to be reunified in making decisions for that child or young person.

Whilst consultation and engagement with parents is important, if the parent/s does not agree for the child or young person to receive the COVID-19 vaccination, the authorised CEO or delegate may make a decision for the child or young person to be vaccinated.

## How to arrange COVID-19 vaccination appointments

Carers or care services providers are encouraged to arrange appointments for eligible children and young people to receive their vaccination as soon as practical in ways that are consistent with the young person’s age and stage of development.

Consultation with a general practitioner or medical specialist is recommended for children and young people with disability or underlying health condition before booking COVID-19 vaccination appointments.

**How to arrange appointments for vaccination**

Information about how to book a COVID-19 vaccine appointment including at a Victorian vaccination centre, or participating doctor’s clinic, pharmacy or community health service is at [Book your vaccine appointment](https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/book-your-vaccine-appointment) <https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/book-your-vaccine-appointment>.

People who are vulnerable and at high risk from COVID-19 can access priority Pfizer vaccine appointments for at vaccination centres. **Children and young people in care are prioritised**.

To book a reserved appointment at a state vaccination clinic, call **1800 675 398 (option 0).**

**Providing consent**

Anyone who presents for vaccination must provide informed consent.

While authorised carers or delegates can provide consent for children and young people in care who cannot provide their own consent, it is important that decisions are made in the best interests of children, with their views obtained in developmentally appropriate and supported ways and that the advice of medical practitioners are considered. Some children and young people may need additional support to receive the vaccine, as at no time is a child or young person to be forced to receive a vaccine.

Wherever possible, in COVID-19 safe ways, it is recommended that one carer or staff member attend the appointment with the child or young person.

Broader guidance about the COVID-19 vaccination including advice about informed consent and vaccination for children aged 12 and above is available at [Victorian COVID-19 Vaccination Guidelines](https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/victorian-covid-19-vaccination-guidelines) <https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/victorian-covid-19-vaccination-guidelines>. In particular, see appendices 23 and 24.

Read more about [who can get vaccinated](https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/who-can-get-vaccinated) <https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/who-can-get-vaccinated> and how to book your vaccine appointment <https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/book-your-vaccine-appointment>.

**Providing proof of vaccination**

To promote the health and safety needs of all children and young people in care, it is important for carers or residential care staff to notify the relevant Child Protection Practitioner or agency case manager once vaccination has occurred. By maintaining up to date health records, including for COVID-19 tests and vaccination, children and young people may experience improved access to the services, supports and opportunities that they need to thrive.

#### More information about COVID-19 and vaccines

<https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/>

<https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/vaccination-information-children-and-teenagers>

<https://www.health.gov.au/news/atagi-statement-on-the-use-of-covid-19-vaccines-in-all-young-adolescents-in-australia>

<https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/vaccination-information-people-disability>

<https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-communities-and-covid-19-vaccines>

<https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/covid-19-vaccination-consent-form-for-covid-19-vaccination>

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