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| Victorian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioner-administered vaccination program - Communique  |
| July 2023 |
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# Introduction

Registered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioners in Victoria play an important role in supporting increased awareness of, and access to, vital vaccines for the communities they serve.

The establishment of the [Victorian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioner-administered vaccination program](https://www.health.vic.gov.au/immunisation/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-health-practitioner-immunisers) recognises the important contribution that this workforce can continue to make to increasing access to, and promotion of, vaccination in Victoria.

# Context

During the recent COVID-19 pandemic, Public Health Emergency Orders (PHEOs) were used to authorise a range of additional workforces to administer the COVID-19 vaccine as part of Victoria’s COVID-19 vaccination program, including registered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioners. Registered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioners, once trained and competent, could possess, prepare and/or administer COVID-19 vaccines under an administration order from a medical practitioner or nurse practitioner. This [PHEO (#8)](https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/information-covid-19-vaccine-providers) will expire on 20 August 2023, as demand for COVID-19 vaccine administration has stabilised.

Registered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioners, who have successfully completed an ‘Immuniser program of study’, will be authorised to possess, prepare and administer approved vaccines through a Secretary Approval made under the *Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Regulations* *2017*.

The Secretary Approval: Registered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioner immuniser (**Secretary Approval**) was gazetted on [20 June 2023 (pp. 1132-1135)](https://www.gazette.vic.gov.au/gazette/Gazettes2023/GG2023G026.pdf#page=28) and will take effect on 21 August 2023.

# What is changing in Victoria from 21 August 2023?

The Secretary Approval provides ongoing authorisation of [registered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioner immunisers](https://www.health.vic.gov.au/immunisation/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-health-practitioner-immunisers) to possess, prepare and/or administer the following vaccines under written administration order (instruction) from a medical practitioner, nurse practitioner or [authorised midwife](https://www.health.vic.gov.au/drugs-and-poisons/authorised-midwives-legislative-requirements):

* Vaccines listed in the [Victorian Immunisation Schedule](https://www.health.vic.gov.au/immunisation/immunisation-schedule-victoria-and-vaccine-eligibility-criteria) (full list in the Secretary Approval)
* Japanese encephalitis vaccine (limited to people recommended for vaccination as listed on the Victorian Department of Health’s [Japanese encephalitis webpage](https://www.health.vic.gov.au/infectious-diseases/japanese-encephalitis))
* Mpox (monkeypox)/vaccinia virus vaccine (limited to people recommended for vaccination as listed on the Victorian Department of Health’s [Mpox (monkeypox) webpage](https://www.health.vic.gov.au/infectious-diseases/mpox-monkeypox))
* SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) vaccine.

Note: Registered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioners can continue to administer COVID-19 vaccines under PHEO #8 until 20 August 2023.

Other vaccines must not be possessed, prepared and/or administered until 21 August 2023 when the Secretary Approval comes into force. The Secretary Approval also has additional training requirements which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Practitioners must complete prior to administering any vaccines (including COVID-19 vaccines from 21 August 2023). A summary of these requirements is included in section 4.

[Guidelines that detail the program requirements](https://www.health.vic.gov.au/immunisation/victorian-guidelines-for-atsihp-immunisers), will soon be published on the Department of Health’s website.

# What are the requirements for registered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioners to administer vaccines from 21 August 2023?

### Registration and baseline immunisation training

The Secretary Approval applies only to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioners who hold general registration with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Practice Board of Australia, and:

* have satisfactorily completed the assessment of an ‘Immuniser program of study’ recognised by the Victorian Chief Health Officer; and
* hold a current first aid certificate (to be updated every three years); and
* hold a current cardiopulmonary resuscitation certificate (to be updated annually).

A registered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioner who meets the requirements as set out in the Secretary Approval is recognised as a ‘registered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioner immuniser’.

### Written instruction

Following obtaining written instruction from a medical practitioner, nurse practitioner or authorised midwife, a registered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioner immuniser may administer approved vaccines in line with the requirements of the Secretary Approval.

### Additional training for specific vaccines

A registered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioner immuniser must complete additional training as specified in the Guidelines to possess and administer Japanese encephalitis, Mpox (monkeypox) and COVID-19 vaccines. As with all approved vaccines, a registered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioner immuniser can only administer these vaccines under written instruction from a medical practitioner, nurse practitioner or authorised midwife.

### Employment

A registered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioner immuniser must be employed, contracted or otherwise engaged by a service provider in Victoria who employs or contracts a medical practitioner, nurse practitioner or authorised midwife (who can give the written instruction). A registered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioner immuniser must only administer the approved vaccines in the performance of their duties with this service provider.

### Supervision

A registered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioner immuniser must only administer the approved vaccines under the indirect supervision of a nominated immuniser supervisor. This supervisor must be a medical practitioner, nurse practitioner, authorised midwife or a [nurse immuniser](https://www.health.vic.gov.au/immunisation/nurse-immunisers) (see the Secretary Approval for details).

### Clinical safety guidelines

A registered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioner immuniser must only administer the approved vaccines in accordance with the editions of the [Australian Immunisation Handbook](https://betahealth.govcms.gov.au/news-and-events/news/the-digital-australian-immunisation-handbook), [National Vaccine Storage Guidelines: Strive for 5](https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2020/04/national-vaccine-storage-guidelines-strive-for-5.pdf) and the Victorian Guidelines for the administration of vaccines by registered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioners (the Guidelines) that are current at the time of vaccine administration (see the Secretary Approval).

## 4.1 Which ‘Immuniser program of study’ courses can registered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioners undertake?

All health professionals administering vaccines in Victoria must complete an ‘Immuniser program of study’ that is recognised by the Victorian Chief Health Officer (CHO). Currently, [CHO-recognised courses for registered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioners](https://www.health.vic.gov.au/immunisation/atsihp-immuniser-study-programs) are:

* The Australian College of Nursing’s [307 Immunisation for Health Practitioners course](https://members.acn.edu.au/immunisation-apply)
* The Australian Catholic University’s [National immunisation education for health professionals course](https://www.acu.edu.au/about-acu/faculties-directorates-and-staff/faculty-of-health-sciences/national-immunisation-education-program-for-health-professionals)
* The South Australia Department of Health’s [Understanding vaccines and the National Immunisation Program course](https://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/public%2Bcontent/sa%2Bhealth%2Binternet/clinical%2Bresources/clinical%2Bprograms%2Band%2Bpractice%2Bguidelines/immunisation%2Bfor%2Bhealth%2Bprofessionals/immunisation%2Bprovider%2Binformation/immunisation%2Bprovider%2Btraining%2Band%2Beducation/understanding%2Bvaccines%2Band%2Bthe%2Bnational%2Bimmunisation%2Bprogram)
* The Benchmarque Group’s [Course in immunisation practice in primary healthcare (10754NAT)](https://www.benchmarquegroup.com.au/courses/immunisation-clinical-pathway#key_information)

A list of these courses are available on the [department’s website](https://www.health.vic.gov.au/immunisation/atsihp-immuniser-study-programs) and will be updated as required.

Registered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioners must successfully complete one of these courses, including the assessment, prior to possessing and administering approved vaccines under the Secretary Approval.

## 4.2 What additional training must registered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioner immunisers undertake to administer Japanese encephalitis, mpox and COVID-19 vaccines?

The department’s ‘Japanese encephalitis’ and ‘Mpox’ vaccination e-learning modules are available to registered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioner immunisers, free of charge, and can both be accessed at this webpage: [Victorian Immunisation Learning Hub (vic-immunisation-learning.com)](https://vic-immunisation-learning.com/immunisation/).

Following successful completion of the ‘Immuniser program of study’ and this additional training, registered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioner immunisers must only administer Japanese encephalitis or mpox vaccine to people recommended for vaccination as listed on the Victorian Department of Health’s webpages (included in section 2 of this document, and updated from time-to-time as required).

The Commonwealth Department of Health’s COVID-19 vaccination training is available to registered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioners and can be accessed at this webpage: [COVID-19 vaccination training program | Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care](https://www.health.gov.au/our-work/covid-19-vaccines/advice-for-providers/covid-19-vaccination-training-program).

The training requirements that are specific to these vaccines will be included in the Guidelines (available soon on the department’s website) and will be updated as required.

# Can registered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioners already administering COVID-19 vaccines continue to do so?

The Public Health Emergency Order (Order)PHEO #8 that authorises registered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioners, who have completed the specified COVID-19 vaccination training and clinical skills competencies assessment, to possess, prepare and/or administer COVID-19 vaccines under a written instruction from a medical practitioner or nurse practitioner **will expire on 20 August 2023**. The expiry of the [PHEO (#8)](https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/information-covid-19-vaccine-providers) will affect all emergency authorised workforces who were authorised to administer COVID-19 vaccination.

**From 21 August 2023, registered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioners will need to comply with the Secretary Approval: Registered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioner immuniser in order to administer COVID-19 and other approved vaccines.**

This means that, from 21 August 2023, registered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioners must have the following to be authorised to possess and administer a COVID-19 vaccine to a person in their care:

* successfully completed a CHO-recognised ‘Immuniser program of study’
* a current first aid certificate
* a current cardiopulmonary resuscitation certificate
* successfully completed the current requirements for COVID-19 vaccination training
* the written instruction from a medical practitioner, nurse practitioner or authorised midwife for the COVID-19 vaccine; and
* indirect supervision from a nominated immuniser supervisor

From 21 August 2023, a registered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioner that **has not met all** of the above requirements, **is unable to possess, prepare or administer a COVID-19 vaccine**.

Current emergency-authorised registered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioners who wish to continue administering COVID-19 vaccines from 21 August 2023, are recommended to satisfactorily complete a CHO-recognised Immuniser program of study and obtain the necessary certificates listed above prior to 20 August 2023.

# More information

If you have any queries about this matter, please email the Aboriginal Health Division AboriginalHealth@health.vic.gov.au

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| To receive this document in another format email the Aboriginal Health Division AboriginalHealth@health.vic.gov.au Authorised and published by the Victorian Government, 1 Treasury Place, Melbourne.© State of Victoria, Australia, Department of Health, July 2023.Available at [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioner immunisers](https://www.health.vic.gov.au/immunisation/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-health-practitioner-immunisers) <https://www.health.vic.gov.au/immunisation/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-health-practitioner-immunisers> |