



## **Australia news**

# Australians will require three Covid vaccine doses to be considered fully vaccinated

**Atagi's new guidance reflects better protection against Omicron variant from booster shot**

## **Josh Butler**

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Australians will now need three Covid vaccine doses to be considered “up to date” with their shots, but it will be left to individual states to set their own rules on booster mandates.

On Thursday, the federal health minister, Greg Hunt, announced the government’s immunisation advisory body had updated its guidance.

The Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation’s new guidance states a third dose is required for someone to be considered “up to date” with their vaccinations.

The new terminology replaces the “fully vaccinated” status which applies to someone who has had two doses, in recognition of the better protection provided by booster shots, particularly against the Omicron variant.

“Atagi recommend that everyone aged 16 years and older receive a booster dose three months after their primary course, to maintain the best protection and an ‘up to date’ status,” Hunt said in a statement.

“Further, Atagi has advised that if it has been longer than six months since a person’s primary course and they haven’t had a booster, they will no longer be considered ‘up to date’ and instead will be considered ‘overdue’.”

The announcement followed the latest meeting of national cabinet where states and territories also agreed to start moving toward the final phase of Australia’s virus reopening plan and begin to treat Covid the same way as the flu.

The Victorian premier, Daniel Andrews, had led calls for the definition of “fully vaccinated” to be extended from two to three doses for several weeks.

National cabinet agreed to set no national three-dose mandates except for workers in aged care, and instead leave booster rules to individual jurisdictions.

Last week, Australia’s chief medical officer, Prof Paul Kelly, had flagged such a change.

“Rather than ‘fully’ [vaccinated], talking about ‘up to date’, that’s the terminology we use with other immunisations,” he said on 3 February.

The new “up to date” definition will only apply for the management of Covid within Australia, Hunt said, and will not stop international tourists who have not had a booster shot from entering the country. Federal government sources cited the “complication” of some overseas countries not yet starting a booster program.

However, individual state governments may set their own rules on how many doses their jurisdiction requires.

Andrews has consistently said if Atagi changes its definition of fully vaccinated, the Victorian government will also extend its vaccinated economy, meaning tourists to Melbourne may need three doses to access hospitality or retail.

National cabinet also agreed to allow states to begin transitioning to Phase D of the national plan for reopening, the final phase of the roadmap.

In that section, jurisdictions could “manage Covid-19 consistent with public health management of other infectious diseases”, including opening international borders, allowing uncapped inbound arrival for vaccinated people, and adjusting health settings to manage Covid in a similar way to influenza.

Federal sources said each state will make such changes to their own timeline, but expected the first changes could be introduced as soon as this month.

Cruise ships are also back on the agenda, with border force, the health department and governments NSW, Victoria and Queensland to start working on a plan to resume the industry.

National cabinet also resolved that the Department of [Health](#) would lead a “winter preparedness audit” of Australia’s health systems, ahead of an expected wave of Covid and flu this winter. It comes a week after Kelly had warned of a dual Covid-flu wave in the colder months.

“I do believe that we will have another wave of Omicron in winter, and I think we will have a flu wave in winter for the first time... since the beginning of 2020,” he said.

The meeting came just hours after Morrison dropped his signature religious discrimination bill from the Senate agenda, as the Coalition claimed legal advice had questioned the “unintended consequences” of non-government amendments from the House of Representatives.

Several members of the national cabinet had voiced serious criticisms and concerns of the religious freedom plan.

The NSW Liberal premier, Dominic Perrottet, said he didn’t believe the changes were necessary, claiming the legislation could “end up creating more problems than it’s attempting to solve”.

Andrews shared worries about the legislation overriding state law. On the contentious changes which would have let religious schools discriminate against students on the basis of gender identity, Andrews also tweeted “we sure as hell don’t need an inquiry to tell us that these laws will harm trans kids.”

“The federal government ought be ashamed,” he said in Victorian parliament on Friday.

The Australian Capital Territory chief minister, Andrew Barr, called for “significant amendments” to the Coalition’s proposal, including dumping the ‘statement of belief’

conditions.

National cabinet will meet again in mid-March.

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