



Media Release

Time between doses of COVID-19 vaccine extended

12 August, 2021

The time between doses of the COVID-19 vaccine is being increased, Director-General of Health Dr Ashley Bloomfield says.

“From today, the standard time will become six weeks between the first and second doses of the vaccine,” he says.

“Moving to a longer gap allows us to give a first dose to a larger number of people faster, which means providing more people with partial protection sooner. This is an important part of our being prepared for a possible outbreak of the more infectious Delta variant of the virus.

“Early findings from a small number of well-designed studies show that an extended duration between doses of the Pfizer vaccine gives at least an equally robust immune response, with no additional safety concerns.

“This new guidance is in line with other international programmes using the Pfizer vaccine. For example, the interval between doses in Denmark and Norway ranges between six and 12 weeks, while the United States uses three weeks but allows up to six weeks.

“The larger interval is also consistent with the advice from the COVID Technical Advisory Group (CVTAG) for an extended interval between doses to reduce the likelihood of a rare side effect of myocarditis or pericarditis.

“I do want to reassure people that if you have already been fully vaccinated with two doses less than six weeks apart, as we have been doing, you will have very strong protection against the virus and do not need to doubt that.

“People who already have vaccinations booked less than six weeks apart can keep their second appointment or choose to change it. Either way, the most important thing is that everybody needs two doses of the vaccine to be fully vaccinated.

“If you already have a booking, you can choose to reschedule it at bookmyvaccine.nz or by phoning the COVID Vaccination Healthline 0800 28 29 26 (8am-8pm, 7 days). If your booking is through your GP, pharmacy or other primary health care provider, you should contact them if you wish to change your booking.

“This new timeline may not suit everyone – there may be some people who are at higher risk, such as immunosuppressed people or those working in higher risk settings like border workers, who may be advised to have their doses three weeks apart.

“There will also be situations where the timeframe between doses will differ from the recommendation – for example, someone travelling overseas may require their doses sooner than six weeks.

“This change won’t impact when we finish our vaccination campaign, but it will ensure more New Zealanders are at least partially vaccinated quicker so our whole population is better protected against any future outbreak.”

Eligibility dates for the remaining age groups have also been brought forward as the programme scales up. As previously announced the 50 plus age band will be open from Friday 13th August.

The timings of other age bands have now been confirmed with the 40 plus age band open from Wednesday 18th August and 30 plus open from Wednesday 25th August. From 1 September all eligible ages will be able to book their free vaccination appointments.

“We are progressing well with our roll-out plan and are on track to make the vaccine available to everyone in New Zealand aged over 16 by the end of the year,” Dr Bloomfield said.

“District Health Boards continue to add capacity to their vaccination programmes, and we are opening age bands sooner than expected because of the high level of interest and increasing system capacity.

“From today people who go on to [BookMyVaccine.nz](https://www.bookmyvaccine.nz) to book their second dose of the vaccine will be offered a date six weeks from the first.”

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