

Media Release

The Hon James Merlino MP
Acting Premier
Minister for Education
Minister for Mental Health



Thursday, 23 December 2021

BOOSTING VICTORIANS' SAFETY OVER THE FESTIVE SEASON

To put us in the best position to respond to Omicron, Victoria will expand its vaccination booster program to deliver up to 300,000 doses a week, support GPs and pharmacies to deliver even more, and take steps to ensure the community's safety over the holidays with updated mask rules to protect Victorians.

With expert modelling and health advice showing that a third dose of the COVID-19 vaccine will be vital in the fight against Omicron, the Government will invest \$31.6 million to support the Commonwealth's booster program.

The massive scale-up will support a significant expansion of state-run vaccination centres, as well as the rapid recruitment and training of new workers – ensuring up to 900,000 doses can be delivered every week in Victoria.

To help increase vaccination capacity, temporary sites are being set up at prominent shopping centre locations. Pop-up sites at Watergardens and Emporium open today, while pop ups have already opened at Highpoint, Pacific Werribee and Eastland - so people can get their third dose while doing their shopping.

Over the coming weeks, 28 vaccination pop-ups will open and current fixed sites will expand to operate 12 hours a day, seven days a week. The flagship centre at the Royal Exhibition Building will stay open until late March.

A re-run of a successful grants program for GPs and pharmacies will help them deliver vaccinations across the 23 Local Government Areas where there is lower primary care coverage, with expressions of interest for the grants of up to \$15,000 opening today.

While the Commonwealth is responsible for the third dose rollout in private residential aged care, the Victorian Government is taking further steps to protect aged care residents by making more booster shots available to them, with every resident in Victoria's public aged care facilities set to be offered a booster by Christmas Day.

Lockdowns are not under consideration because Victorians have made the state one of the most vaccinated places in the world.

As a sensible measure to reduce hospitalisations, from 11:59pm tonight masks will return indoors (except in the home) for people aged eight and over. This means masks will be required when moving around major events with more than 30,000 people, however not when patrons are seated outdoors.

To protect themselves and others, Victorians are being encouraged to take advantage of this festive period to work from home – until more data about the spread of the emerging Omicron variant is gathered and examined.

Those who want to be as COVIDSafe as possible are also strongly encouraged to stick to seated service while inside hospitality venues rather than moving around crowded venues, and to save their dance moves for dancefloors in well ventilated outdoor areas.

As the Government awaits updated dose interval ATAGI advice, the planned scale up to support third doses will launch on 4 January 2022.

All Victorians who are eligible for a third dose five months after their second shot are urged to book an appointment as soon as possible – especially those at higher risk of contracting the virus, such as healthcare workers.

For information about coronavirus visit coronavirus.vic.gov.au or call 1800 675 398.

Ensuring children are protected from coronavirus is also vital, and parents are encouraged to get their kids vaccinated when the rollout for five to 11-year-olds begins on 10 January 2022.

Parents can be confident that the scale up of the booster program will not delay their child's protection as paediatric vaccination appointments will be ringfenced in the booking system.

Quotes attributable to Acting Premier James Merlino

"We're able to keep our state open because more than 90 per cent of Victorians got vaccinated, in record time. We're not going back to lockdowns, we're vaccinating our way through."

"These are modest but meaningful steps we can take over summer to ensure we stay open see the people we love this Christmas. Masks and boosters mean less COVID exposure, fewer workers in isolation, and more businesses open and disruption free."

Quotes attributable to Minister for Health Martin Foley

"If you're eligible, it's vital that you step forward to protect yourself and your loved ones from serious disease, and keep our state safe, open and thriving."

"These changes will help us protect the most vulnerable people in the community while more Victorians go and get their third dose."