



Clinician alert #73 – all clinicians

Effective from 13 December 2021

New information

- The [COVID-19 CDNA National Guidelines for Public Health Units](#) were updated on 9 December 2021 (version 6.2) and include revisions to reflect the emergence of the Omicron variant and advice on the use of vaccination in outbreak situations.

Omicron variant

- A new variant of SARS-CoV-2 was reported to the World Health Organization on 24 November 2021. It was named Omicron and classified as a ‘variant of concern’ (VOC) on 26 November 2021.
- May be a delay between the identification of a new VOC, such as Omicron, and the availability of data and evidence to guide appropriate public health interventions.
- Where there are emerging VOCs with uncertain viral characteristics, jurisdictions may consider a more conservative approach to case and contact management and public health and social measures.
- The updated guidelines provide advice on a more conservative approach to release from isolation criteria (e.g. require all cases to fulfil criteria outlined for unvaccinated cases), close contact identification and contact management (e.g. consider upgrading contact classifications and management to a higher risk category).

Vaccination in outbreak situations

- Targeted vaccination of defined populations who may be at risk of exposure is an important activity complementing existing public health interventions.
- Targeted vaccination may increase the proportion of people who have received one dose, are fully vaccinated, or have received a booster dose of a COVID-19 vaccination (where eligible).
- COVID-19 vaccination during outbreaks can be used by Public Health Units to:
 - Reduce the number and severity of COVID-19 cases where there is likely to be an ongoing risk of exposure (e.g. in closed settings such as residential aged care facilities, correctional facilities, remote industrial sites or educational institutions) and;
 - Opportunistically increase vaccination uptake in this population.
- Key considerations about using COVID-19 vaccines during outbreaks include: the location, target population, context of the outbreak, local epidemiology of COVID-19 and timing of potential exposure.
- Vaccination as an outbreak response tool is of greatest use in geographic areas or populations with low vaccination coverage.

Dr SHARON NOWROJEE

**PUBLIC HEALTH PHYSICIAN
STATE HEALTH INCIDENT COORDINATION CENTRE**