

# Australia to give fourth COVID-19 jab to over 65s

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Australia is offering a fourth dose of COVID-19 vaccines to over 65s from next month, federal health authorities announced Friday, as a new Omicron strain races through the population.

The top advisory group on vaccines approved the fourth shot for [vulnerable groups](#): those aged over 65, [indigenous people](#) over 50, people who are immunocompromised and care home residents.

In the past six weeks, other countries, including France, Germany and Sweden as well as [health authorities](#) in England, have recommended a fourth COVID-19 vaccine dose for the most vulnerable, including the elderly.

Australia has been reporting daily infection rates of more than 50,000 in the past few days—about double those of just a month earlier—blamed partly on the rise of a more infectious BA.2 Omicron variant.

Health Minister Greg Hunt said the extra dose would be available from April 4—nearly two months before the start of the Australian winter—for people who had a third dose at least four months earlier.

"A booster is your best protection against the most severe impacts of COVID and may provide protection against long COVID," Hunt said.

The health minister also said people arriving in Australia would no longer have to get proof of a negative COVID-19 test in advance when emergency COVID-19 legislation expires April 17.

Passengers would, however, still need to be vaccinated, and to wear masks on flights.

## **Protection wanes**

Australia's technical advisory group on immunisation, ATAGI, said Pfizer and Moderna were the preferred vaccines for the extra booster shot.

But there was as yet "[insufficient evidence](#)" of the benefits of a fourth dose for other groups in the broader population, it said in a statement.

Raina MacIntyre, head of the biosecurity program at the Kirby Institute of the University of NSW, welcomed news of a fourth jab but said she would have preferred the dose be made available to everyone aged over 50.

"Protection from three doses wanes substantially after a few months, even against severe outcomes like hospitalisation and death," she said.

"At 50 years, the [immune system](#) starts to decline in a process called immunosenescence, and it declines exponentially and predictably from then on," she said.

"This has been well studied for other infections, and COVID-19 seems to follow the same pattern."

MacIntyre encouraged Australians to get their third and, for those who qualify, fourth doses.

"This is not a cold or the flu. There is now substantial evidence of serious long-term effects including [brain damage](#), [heart disease](#), lung disease and diabetes in a proportion of survivors, even in people with mild infection," she said.

Australia has reported a total 3.93 million COVID-19 infections since the pandemic began, with 5,824 deaths

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