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Thousands to get jab at mass clinics

Age, Melbourne



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Tens of thousands of Victorians are set to receive the AstraZeneca jab at mass vaccination centres in Melbourne hospitals, including an enormous temporary clinic built within Sunshine Hospital's multi-storey car park.

Once they reach peak capacity, it is estimated that more than 20,000 people a week will be vaccinated at the clinic and another similar centre at the Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital.

The first AstraZeneca jab administered to a Victorian health-care worker was given to an infection control nurse at the Heidelberg hospital yesterday morning.

The operation lead of Austin Health's coronavirus vaccine clinics, Dr Janine Trevillyan, said it was expected the clinic could be vaccinating about 10,000 people every month.

While the first weeks of Australia's vaccination program focused on healthcare and workers in other high-risk jobs – the category known as 1a on the vaccine priority list – more members of the public could get their first shot in weeks.

The jab will be made available to those aged 70 and over and other adults considered at higher risk of falling ill with coronavirus, when phase 1b of the vaccine rollout begins. After that, focus moves to category 2a (other critical workers and adults 50 and over) then 2b (the rest of the adult population).

“I think probably within a couple of weeks we'll be at the 1b group,” said Dr Trevillyan.

“And then we are anticipating we will be open for the rest of the year to help vaccinate the general

public.”

The Heidelberg hospital vaccination clinic is a former function space and meeting room transformed into 20 vaccination cubicles and a large observation room, designed with extra space for people who need a walker.

The clinic at the Sunshine Hospital is larger. On the ground floor of the multi-storey car park, it has 60 cubicles, three observation spaces, a reception area and a pharmacy, all spanning more than 2000 square metres.

Before it opened last Thursday, vinyl flooring had to be laid down to allow for proper cleaning, which proved a challenge when it was discovered the floor of the car park was slightly uneven.

Lisa Smith, in charge of Western Health's COVID-19 vaccination hubs, said she anticipated that the clinic would continue to be used to vaccinate the broader community

once the job of vaccinating health-care workers was complete. Ms Smith said the service had estimated, based on the requirements of the Pfizer vaccine, that they could conduct 11,000 vaccinations per week, but as the AstraZeneca was easier to manage, it could be more.

“If we operated 20 cubicles, seven days a week, eight hours a day ... we'd be getting to about 1600 [vaccinations a day]. And then we scale up from there.”

GPs are set to be at the forefront of the vaccine rollout to the general public, but Ms Smith said people also had confidence in the hospital-run clinics.

A Victorian government spokeswoman said the public could expect more vaccination centres

linked to community health organisations and hospitals as the AstraZeneca rollout began.

Australian Medical Association vice-president Chris Moy said mass centres would be instrumental to rolling out the vaccine across the wider population, but would not be appropriate for all patients.



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THE ROLLOUT

- **Phase 1a:** Includes border workers, quarantine staff, aged care residents and front-line health workers, including paramedics
- **Phase 1b:** Includes people aged 70 and over, people with certain medical conditions and some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults
- **Phase 2a:** People aged 50 and over and other critical and high-risk workers
- **Phase 2b:** Balance of adult population

The Western Health Sunshine Hospital vaccination hub spans more than 2000 square metres. Photos: Penny Stephens, Western Health