



TIME TO GET ON WITH THE JAB

Allison Lamb, nurse unit manager at the new Western Health vaccination hub open from today at Melbourne Showgrounds. Picture: REBECCA MICHAEL

Showgrounds open as vaccine rolls out for under 50s

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ALMOST half a million Victorians under 50 can receive a Pfizer COVID-19 jab from Monday at 30 state government vaccination sites.

Health authorities are gearing up for a vaccination blitz as 400,000 eligible Victorians get access to the Pfizer vaccine and a new mass vaccination centre opens at Melbourne Show-

grounds.

Acting Premier James Merlino said the sites were ready to vaccinate workers in "critical industries" such as defence, emergency services, meat and seafood processing, as well as disability workers.

People with underlying medical conditions such as diabetes or heart disease can also

book appointments.

"We're in a good space," Mr Merlino said. "If you're part of those eligible cohorts and you're under 50, please call and make an appointment."

A Health Department spokesman said Pfizer vaccinations would be administered "strictly by booking only" to control stock levels at designated centres, including the

Austin and Box Hill hospitals.

People with health issues eligible for the vaccine must show evidence of their conditions.

Public transport, taxi and rideshare drivers will have access to the vaccine from May 24.

Allison Lamb, nurse unit manager of Western Health's

COVID vaccination hub at the Melbourne Showgrounds, said given its location at the edge of the city a busy week was expected.

Their 50 cubicles will offer vaccinations from 8am-7pm.

"There have definitely been bookings, but we're expecting a lot of walk-ins," Ms Lamb

said. "We've got 60 staff and we're very ready for whatever comes.

"The location is really appealing for people heading into the city for work. This inner-west area hasn't been targeted yet."

Mr Merlino said expanding the rollout would stand the state in better stead to abandon what chief health officer Brett Sutton called Australia's "fortress" pandemic response.

"We need more, we can do more," Mr Merlino said.

"Our state sites can deliver two to three times the amount that we're doing at the

moment, but it's all dependent on the supply of the vaccine from the commonwealth."

While eligible people must book in their Pfizer jab, vaccination centres will continue to offer the AstraZeneca vaccine to Victorians 50 and over.

From this Monday, GPs can also administer AstraZeneca to Victorians over 50.

As of Sunday, 311,317 AstraZeneca doses had been administered in Victoria. And all close contacts of a Wollert man who contracted the virus in Adelaide had returned negative tests.

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