

**AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF
GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS**

PRESS RELEASE 897

**PUBLIC TEACHER VACCINATIONS IN THE PANDEMIC
HOW MUCH DO WE VALUE OUR TEACHERS AND STUDENTS?**

Are public school teachers essential, front line workers in the pandemic who should be given vaccination priority ?

The Coalition governments, federal and State are gradually being forced to recognise their central role in keeping the society and economy afloat.

The Australian Education Union Victorian Branch, however, is still calling on the Federal Government to prioritise the vaccination of education staff.

Unfortunately, as yet, from the Morrison government there has been no decision to prioritise the vaccination of education workers.

Since the very beginning of the pandemic, they have encouraged members and the broader community to adhere to restrictions and to follow public health advice. This has helped ensure the safety of teachers, support staff, and principals, as well as the safety of students and their families.

This continues to be the AEU's position and, in line with public health advice, they are encouraging staff in all education settings to get a COVID-19 vaccination as soon as they are eligible.

They acknowledge that community members who are the most vulnerable to COVID-19 must continue to be prioritised, as well as workers in priority groups. However, there is an immediate need to broaden the eligibility of priority groups to include education staff. Unless education staff are able to have priority access to a vaccine, we continue to be at risk of more disruptions

Earlier this year, the AEU wrote to the federal and state health ministers seeking that all education workers in schools, kindergartens, TAFE and disability services be considered a priority group for the COVID-19 vaccination.

Prioritising these essential workers for vaccination would be an effective way to reduce the disruptions that inevitably arise during periods of lockdown. While the research is still in its preliminary stages, it appears that the Delta variant is more transmissible across all age groups - including children.

In countries with high vaccination rates amongst the older age groups such as Israel and the United Kingdom, infections in children and young people are fuelling a third wave.

Australia is Falling Behind the Rest of the World

Unfortunately, there has been no federal – or Victorian State decision to prioritise the vaccination of education workers. And in this, Australia is falling behind the many other countries in the world – except the UK.

School teachers have been prioritised for COVID-19 vaccination in many nations around the world, including the USA and most of Europe.

Unlike Australia, many nations around the world treat teachers as frontline workers, including most of continental Europe and North America.

That's not the case in the United Kingdom, where the Delta variant has seen 150 outbreaks within schools.

In the UK, there has been an increase in hospital admissions in young people with Delta.

That was brought home at a local level when NSW health authorities revealed that a 16-year-old boy is now critically ill with the virus in a Sydney ICU.

Also among the growing number of people in ICUs in the state are people aged in their 20s, 30s and 40s.

Yet vaccinations for younger age groups in Australia remain months away, with authorities saying they hope to [open up the Pfizer vaccine to those under 40 by September](#).

For those under 18 - the last category set to be vaccinated according to the federal government's rollout schedule - that date is even further off.

Vulnerability of Public School Teachers

The latest outbreak in New South Wales and the introduction of the delta variant into Australia however, has heightened the vulnerability of public school teachers and the inadequacies of the Coalition response.

[There are growing calls for teachers to be given priority access to COVID-19 vaccinations](#) amid concerns the Delta variant could create a "tinderbox situation" within schools.

NSW Teachers' Federation member Alisa Stephens said teachers have felt taken for granted for the past 18 months of the pandemic, as state leaders insist schools remain safe for students but little is done to protect at-risk staff.

"We have been asked to show up, to stay at work, to stay with our students, stay face to face. We understand those things are important, and yet no priority has been given," she told Weekend Today this morning.

NSW Teachers' Federation member Alisa Stephens is calling for teachers to get priority when it comes to receiving the COVID-19 vaccination. (Weekend Today)

"We are classed in the general public in terms of getting vaccinations."

Ms Stephens said she registered for her COVID-19 vaccination back in May as Pfizer was opened up to over 40s, but is still waiting for the first available appointment in three weeks' time.

But many of her colleagues are facing an even longer wait, unable to find an available appointment until September

"That's the end of next term - that's 10 weeks away," she said.

"That's a bit concerning."

Similar calls for priority vaccination have also come Northern Territory branch and Queensland Teachers' Union (QTU)

While in NSW, school students have been on holidays for the past fortnight and are set to learn from home this week, there are concerns a return to the classroom - currently scheduled for July 19 - could see a "tinderbox situation" as the Delta variant continues its spread through Greater Sydney.

"Teachers are in quite close proximity to 30 students an hour," Ms Stephens said.

"It might be six lessons in a day, six periods in a day - that's 180 students."

"Schools are busy places and there are lots of other adults as well in that space. Social distancing isn't always practical or appropriate, particularly for people working with younger students."

Already, there were a number of clusters within schools at the end of Term 2 which saw fellow students and staff infected, including a mystery case in a nine-year-old in Sydney's east.

Some success

The NSW Teachers Federation has had some success in gaining recognition for the essential work of NSW public school teachers. The news has recently come through that

10,000 teachers in south-west Sydney are to be prioritised in vaccine rollout

By: [Conor Burke](#) in [News](#), [Top Stories](#) July 12, 2021 [0](#)

More than 10,000 teachers in COVID-19 plagued south-west Sydney are set to be prioritised in the state's vaccine rollout, the state government announced on Monday.

More than 10,000 teachers and school staff in South Western Sydney's areas of COVID concern will have priority access to the vaccine rollout

A vaccine hub will begin operating at Fairfield Showground by Friday, 16 July to vaccinate teachers and aged care workers.

Minister for Education and Early Childhood Education Sarah Mitchell welcomed the move and encouraged teachers to take advantage of this opportunity.

“I’m thrilled teachers are being prioritised for vaccination in the areas of Fairfield, Canterbury Bankstown and Liverpool local government areas,” Ms Mitchell said.

“Vaccinating teachers is something I have been advocating for both with my colleagues and also publicly.

“Over half our workforce are eligible for the vaccine, and now teachers in areas of concern for COVID-19 transmission have priority access.”

The priority access extends to all staff, including teachers, administration staff and support officers working for government and non-government schools in the designated Fairfield, Canterbury Bankstown and Liverpool local government areas.

“I encourage all staff who are eligible for the vaccine to get vaccinated as soon as possible, and for those in impacted LGAs take full advantage of this priority access,”

Ms Mitchell said. Eligible staff will be issued links to access a vaccine appointment and they will need to provide proof of employment when they arrive for their vaccination

A little recognition from the NSW Liberal government, hopefully, not too late!

DOGS suggest that Morrison has been missing in action. The recognition afforded the 10,000 teachers in Sydney’s current pandemic hot spot should be extended to all teachers and students in schools around the country.

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