

SERVICE STANDARD 7.1.9

COVID-19 VACCINATION

ITEM	DESCRIPTION
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SOPs	› None
Owner	Executive Director People and Strategy
Contact	Director Health and Safety
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1 Purpose and Scope

- 1.1 Under the *NSW Work Health and Safety Act 2001*, the NSW Rural Fire Service (NSW RFS) has a duty of care to minimise, so far as is reasonably practicable, the risk of exposure to COVID-19 in the workplace.
- 1.2 This standard outlines the NSW RFS COVID-19 vaccination and reporting requirements for all members in order to provide a safer work environment for our people and protect continuity and capacity for service delivery to the community.
- 1.3 The measures outlined in this policy have been informed by:
 - › [C2021-16: Guidance for Government Sector Agencies regarding COVID-19 Vaccinations for their Employees](#) ;
 - › [NSW RFS COVID-19 Risk Management: Vaccination and Status Reporting](#) guiding document and detailed risk assessments; and
 - › Feedback received from NSW RFS members.
- 1.4 Further review of the standard will be informed by changes to legislation, Public Health Orders, Government directives or NSW RFS risk assessments.
- 1.5 This standard applies to all existing members of NSW RFS as well as those who are seeking to join the NSW RFS, including:
 - › executive and non-executive employees - ongoing, temporary and casual staff members;
 - › volunteer members of NSW RFS brigades;
 - › applicants for membership of NSW RFS brigades; and
 - › external labour (contractors) physically located at NSW RFS sites and working in close proximity to staff members.

2 Definitions

- 2.0 For the purpose of this Service Standard the following definitions apply:
- a. **COVID-19 vaccination:** at least two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine approved by the Therapeutic Goods Administration for use in Australia.
 - b. **Reserve member:** a member who holds the Membership Type of “Reserve” in their brigade membership record.
 - i. Membership Types are part of the NSW RFS membership classification system and include the categories of Operational, Operational Support, Administration, Social, Reserve, and Community Fire Unit (CFU).
 - ii. Reserve members do not participate in regular brigade activities or operations but may be called upon if required to fulfil necessary emergency response priorities where other members are not available or sufficient.

3 Policy Position

Mandatory COVID-19 Vaccination

- 3.1 The NSW RFS has set a mandatory requirement for COVID-19 vaccination for all NSW RFS members, as well as external labour (contractors) located at NSW RFS sites and working in close proximity to members.
- 3.2 A further condition of ongoing membership, employment or engagement is the requirement to remain fully vaccinated against COVID-19, including additional / booster vaccinations, as determined by the NSW RFS.
- 3.3 Members are required to report their vaccination status and ensure it is recorded in their membership record.

Reporting and Recording Vaccination Status

- 3.4 The [NSW RFS COVID-19 Vaccination Records Management Protocol](#) provides the framework for the collection, storage, access, usage and disclosure of member vaccination status information for COVID-19.

4 Exemptions

Medical Exemptions

- 4.1 An exemption to mandatory vaccination may be available for members who are unable to be vaccinated due to medical contraindication(s) to the COVID-19 vaccines.
- 4.2 Members seeking a medical exemption must show evidence that their medical contraindication is recorded on the Australian Immunisation Register (AIR). To be recorded on the AIR a registered medical practitioner must submit details of the exemption using the [Immunisation Medical Exemption Form](#).
- 4.3 Once a medical exemption is confirmed, each case will be individually considered noting the medical condition, working arrangements, type of work, availability of alternative work, or anything else that may be relevant.
- 4.4 For health advice regarding COVID-19 vaccinations or medical contraindication(s) seek advice from a registered medical professional or email the Health & Safety team at healthy@rfs.nsw.gov.au.

Brigade Exemptions

- 4.5 Exemptions to mandatory vaccination may be applied to identified brigades where service delivery impacts are confirmed to be significant, specifically where there is considerable risk that community protection will not be maintained due to a lack of available volunteers.
- 4.6 Applications for brigade exemption will be accepted up to 30 June 2022. Only those brigades whose 2022 Annual General Meeting is scheduled later than this date and who cannot otherwise meet to consider the issue may seek an exemption after 30 June, but no later than 31 October 2022.
- 4.7 Members of brigades who cannot meet prior to June 30, 2022 will not be subject to the non-compliance provisions of Section 5 of this Service Standard until 1 November 2022, or the holding of their 2022 AGM, whichever occurs first.
- 4.8 Members of an exempted brigade, or members transferring to an exempt brigade, will not be required to be vaccinated or provide details of vaccination while the exemption is in place.
- 4.9 An exempted brigade can train for and respond to incidents within its normal response area or District for the period of the exemption. Members of an exempted brigade will not be responded out of area or members permitted to join out of area responses, unless approved by State Operations as a last resort.
- 4.10 Brigade exemptions will be reviewed at least annually.

Junior Member Exemptions

- 4.11 Junior members and applicants for junior membership (between 12 and 17 years of age) are not subject to mandatory vaccination requirements but are strongly encouraged to follow vaccine recommendations appropriate to their age group.

5 Non-Compliance

Staff Members

- 5.1 Where a staff member is found to be not complying with COVID-19 vaccination requirements in this policy, the staff member will be instructed to take leave immediately. Staff may access accrued recreation leave, extended leave, agreed absences (if eligible), and leave without pay, or a combination of these types of leave for this purpose, but may not access sick leave or special leave provisions.
- 5.2 If a medical exemption is accepted, an individual risk assessment will be performed to determine if the staff member can continue in employment with additional control measures in place. Where a workplace adjustment is required and cannot be made, consideration may be given to whether the person can continue in employment.
- 5.3 If no exemption is granted it may be determined that the staff member has refused to comply with a reasonable direction of the NSW RFS. Failure to comply with this reasonable direction may be deemed a breach of the Service Standard 1.1.7 NSW RFS Code of Conduct and Ethics, may result in misconduct action being undertaken in accordance with Section 69 of the *Government Sector Employment Act 2013*, and may lead to termination of employment.

Volunteer Members

- 5.4 From 1 July 2022 all membership applicants will be asked to declare their vaccination status.
- 5.5 Applicants aged 16 and above who are not existing members of the NSW RFS or applying for junior membership will not be accepted unless they are fully vaccinated against COVID-19 and provide confirmatory evidence.
- 5.6 Transferring or dual membership applicants must comply with the mandatory vaccination requirements of the brigade they are seeking to join.

- 5.7 From 1 July 2022 where a member with the membership type of Operational, Operational Support, or Administration has not provided their vaccination status and has not been granted an exemption, that member will be moved to the membership type of 'Reserve' in all non-exempt brigades to which they belong.
- 5.8 Members with membership type of Social or Community Fire Unit will not have their membership type changed to Reserve. However if these members have not provided their vaccination status they will be subject to the same restrictions on participation in NSW RFS activities as Reserve members.

Reserve Membership

- 5.9 Reserve members will only be called upon to participate in NSW RFS activities should emergency response priorities necessitate it.
- 5.10 Participation in necessary emergency operations within the Reserve member's normal response area may be authorised by the member's Captain. Participation in operations outside the Reserve member's normal response area must be authorised by State Operations Duty Officer or State Operations Controller.
- 5.11 Unless called upon to fulfil a necessary emergency response function, a Reserve member shall not participate in NSW RFS operations or activities or attend NSW RFS facilities.
- 5.12 A Reserve member may still perform tasks or functions that do not involve face to face contact with other members or the public, or attendance at NSW RFS facilities. Reserve members may participate remotely in brigade activities in accordance with the provisions of their brigade constitution.
- 5.13 Reserve members cannot be appointed to field or group officer positions.
- 5.14 Brigades can elect Reserve members to administrative positions where they determine the position duties can be fulfilled remotely and members will not attend NSW RFS facilities to perform the role.
- 5.15 A Reserve member who provides evidence of vaccination after 1 July 2022 may be moved or reinstated to a different category of membership and participate in brigade activities accordingly.

6 Related documents

- > [NSW Work Health and Safety Act 2011](#)
- > [NSW Public Health Orders for COVID-19](#)
- > [Fact Sheet – Recording of COVID-19 Vaccination Status](#)
- > [NSW RFS COVID-19 Vaccination Records Management Protocol](#)

7 Amendments

AMENDMENT DATE	VERSION NO	DESCRIPTION
24 June 2022	1.0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Initial release as SS 7.1.9 > Repeals and remakes P3.4.2 COVID-19 Vaccination v1.0