

TRANSCRIPT: MULTICULTURAL LEADERS ZOOM FORUM- 3RD FEBRUARY 2021

Dr Jeannette Young

I'd like to acknowledge the elders past, present and emerging. And I would again like to acknowledge the great job everyone has done throughout Queensland. So we've not seen a single case in one of our discrete First Nations communities in Queensland, which has been fantastic. I'd also like to acknowledge all of you because similarly, we have not seen in Queensland any outbreaks in any particularly culturally or linguistically diverse community in Queensland. We have had a few cases and we've been concerned but you as leaders in your communities have stood up and responded and worked fantastically with your community. I commend you for that. You now have an enormous job ahead of you, but I know you will do it, and that's to get all of your communities vaccinated against covid-19 so we can all return to some degree of normality in our lives. Thank you for arranging these events. We've had quite a few that I've been able to attend so far, and they've always been excellent. So please, could you keep on organising them? And I'm very happy to always attend. It's been extremely useful as a way of getting out to people and talking to people. Tonight's forum is about the vaccine and it's just so exciting. I mean, it's an absolute credit to the scientists across the world in the work that they have done so rapidly, but still so safely and so effectively to develop a large range of very, very good vaccines. We are fortunate to be living in this era.

The Australian covid-19 vaccination policy was endorsed by the National cabinet on the 13th of November last year and our QLD vaccine policy was endorsed in Townsville last week. So that's very good. We have absolute support at both the National and the State level, and we need that not only because of the importance of that support, but the finances, because this is a very big enterprise. Now, decisions about who will receive the vaccine first have been made at the Commonwealth level, and they've been worked through with all the States and Territories. That has all been very clearly outlined. Before any vaccine can be used in our country, it must be fully approved by the Therapeutic Goods Administration. I'm pleased to announce that they are the most thorough group in the world and any vaccine that they deem is safe and effective, I can assure you, absolutely it is. They are very thorough in what they do. To date, we've got a lot of information on clinical trials for two particular vaccines, the Pfizer vaccine and the AstraZeneca vaccine, and Australia has put in place orders for both of those.

The Pfizer vaccine will start arriving in the country in the next couple of weeks but will then roll out throughout the rest of this calendar year. Then even more exciting is the AstraZeneca vaccine, which will be produced by CSL in Victoria. They have already started production and they have announced that by end of March, they will be providing one million doses per week of the locally produced vaccine under licence from AstraZeneca. There will be plenty of the AstraZeneca vaccine for every Australian who can be vaccinated. The reason we want everyone to be vaccinated is that we know through all of those trials, that if you do get vaccinated, your own immune system will be able to respond much more quickly, much more effectively, and will protect you against getting severe disease. In addition, we have received results overnight from the AstraZeneca vaccine showing its protection against a lot of the spread, not 100 per cent, but it looks to be very efficacious in terms of stopping the spread. More info- <https://www.health.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/covid-19-vaccines/about-covid-19-vaccines/australias-vaccine-agreements>

On Monday 25th of January, TGA gave approval for the use of the Pfizer vaccine for people 16 years of age and over in Australia. The trials to date haven't been done for children and definitely not under 12. There are some studies being done for older children. The challenge of Pfizer vaccine is the requirement to store it at minus 70 degrees Celsius and there not many freezers that can store to that temperature level, and the quantity available initially will be small. So it's only going initially to a small number of hubs around the country. Here in Queensland, we have now six hubs- Cairns Hospital, Townsville Hospital, Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital, Princess Alexandra Hospital, Sunshine Coast University Hospital and Gold Coast University Hospital. Initially, the Pfizer vaccine will probably only go out to one or two hubs and then go out further to the other

hubs. Initial Pfizer doses will only be for those first few priority groups that have been determined nationally- quarantine workers, border workers, and frontline health care workers who are looking after known cases of covid-19. Then after that, we will look at residents and workers of aged care and disability care facilities. Once we get access to the AstraZeneca vaccine, assuming that it will be approved by the TGA, we will then be able to distribute it very widely throughout the State.

Once we get more vaccines, we will rapidly move to the vulnerable group, so that is the older people, those who have significant chronic disease and First Nations people. Once we've got more of the AstraZeneca vaccine, then everyone in Queensland, 16 years of age and over will be vaccinated, as long as they're not excluded because there are some groups at this stage, we need to look at very carefully, pregnant women being the main one. COVID 19 vaccine will not be made mandatory. Every single person will choose whether or not they wish to be vaccinated. The AstraZeneca vaccine just needs a normal cold chain conditions that we are all used to. It needs to be stored between two degrees Celsius and eight degrees Celsius, and it's also being made here in Australia. So we're not dependent on any supply chain issues and Commonwealth has organized plenty of that vaccine so that every Australian who's able to have it can have it. Also, Queensland Health will be rolling out mass vaccination clinics in places like stadiums, in different venues, and people will be told when they are available. But you'll have to wait a bit that all of that won't happen until probably end of March.

We now need to get the message out. Communication campaign in collaboration and leveraging off the work that the Australian government has already done and you might have seen the ads have already started rolling out from the Australian government about the vaccine. We are also doing a lot of work and we'll work with you to do this, of course, to translate information into all of the relevant languages (around 32), and we'll make sure we circulate them through all of you and through other multicultural organizations and leaders to make sure that we've got that all right and that we've made it so that it's easy to read and understand. We will still need to practise the physical distancing, wearing a mask when you can't physically distant, good hand hygiene and using sanitizer. Most importantly of all, and I can't overemphasize, we must all get into the habit of staying home when we're sick and get ourselves tested. This will stop us not only from getting COVID, but also flu.

QUESTION SESSION WITH DR YOUNG

Q- We have very interesting questions and we'll start off with questions regarding the roll out. Are there people who should wait to get the vaccine because they had Covid in the last three months or pregnant and breastfeeding women, or those trying to get pregnant and other health issues? Does the government have a plan to work out which vaccine would be most suitable for people with a certain health conditions, or will vaccines be randomly provided?

A- If you have had covid-19, that is no reason to not get vaccinated. In fact, you should get vaccinated because we don't know how long immunity will continue and we can't be certain who's had it and who hasn't had it. Similarly, the UK made the decision to vaccinate everyone independent of whether or not people had previously been infected. There's no risk by getting vaccinated if you've already had Covid 19 previously.

The second thing is studies have not been done on pregnant women. The advice from the Royal Australasian College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists is that pregnant women should not get vaccinated unless they fall in one of those really high risk groups. Pregnant women should talk to their obstetrician or midwife about it, and they should make a decision whether the risk is better for the woman to be vaccinated than not. The college is suggesting that the high risk group are pregnant women with significant pre-existing medical conditions, such as diabetes, solid organ transplant recipients, those with chronic respiratory conditions, including cystic fibrosis and severe asthma, those with homozygous sickle cell disease, those receiving immunosuppression therapies and those receiving dialysis or with advanced chronic kidney

disease, and those with significant congenital acquired heart disease. But at this point in time, pregnant women should not be vaccinated until we have enough evidence.

There is absolutely no evidence that someone needs to wait after being vaccinated before they fall pregnant. There's no issue there. There's no suggestion that there's any increased risk to the baby or any increased risk of miscarriage etc. Similarly, there's no risk to a woman who is breast feeding or any risk to her breast feeding baby. You can go online to the College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists and they have a statement from them which is easy to access. <https://ranzcog.edu.au/statements-guidelines/covid-19-statement/covid-19-vaccination-information>.

Q- So the other question was for people who have autoimmune diseases, people with cardiac issues and other medical conditions, should they have the vaccine?

A-Yes, they're the most important because they are the most vulnerable. So they need to be vaccinated. Once we have that first group sorted and we get a bit more vaccines, we'll then be rolling it out to older people and those people with some severe chronic disease.

Q- And just as a follow up to that. What about the side effects? What are the side effects of the vaccine?

A-Yep, there are side effects, a few more than we are usually used to with vaccines, but they are minor and self-limiting. There are a very small number of people who have had severe anaphylactic reactions to other vaccines. But there have not been any deaths linked to the vaccine. If people have got severe allergies, they should talk to the person who's going to vaccinate them about it, but there are very few people who can't safely have this vaccine.

Q- All right, thank you. What will be the options for booking for the vaccine if they can't go online?

A-There will be plenty of options. People will be able to go to their GP and to a local pharmacy. People won't have to book online or even ring up. All that will get sorted and there will be frequent communications coming up on when and how to book.

Q- Is it possible to choose which vaccine to get?

A- They are both fantastic vaccines. For me, I am going to take the one that someone offers me, and that's my advice to everyone. They're both excellent vaccines. The only challenge with the Pfizer one is its storage and the difficulties in diluting it and drawing it up as it's a very fragile vaccine. However, it's a great vaccine. The AstraZeneca vaccine is equally excellent and much easier to deliver. So that'll be the one that will go out to most people. I don't think people should worry themselves about which vaccine is offered. They should take either of them. It's more important to get vaccinated at the first opportunity. You have to have two doses of the same vaccine initially. But after that, you'll be able to get whatever vaccines are on offer. And Australia will continue to review the vaccines on offer and we'll continue to work out the best ones.

Q- Should one get both the flu vaccine and the COVID vaccine?

A- Oh, absolutely, yes. I think this is being reviewed at the moment, but you have to have two weeks between the flu vaccine and the Covid vaccine, either before or after. And you've got to have three or four weeks between the two doses of the Covid vaccine. As soon as the flu vaccine comes out, people should go and get vaccinated against that because then they can have the Covid vaccine two weeks after that. However, the vaccine provider will sort that out with people.

Q- Ok, so and will that be every year for both?

A- No, that's just this year at the moment. There are already some trials happening to combine the flu vaccines and Covid vaccines and working out how quickly you can have one and then the other. This information will continue to be updated once we have more evidence from trials. We also don't recommend that everyone needs to get the flu vaccine, although there are some groups who must be flu vaccinated.

Q- All right, the next question is regarding travel; will there be some mandatory requirements to get the vaccine, for example, a vaccine passport like the yellow fever card that people carry around?

A- I think some of the airlines have announced that. So at this point in time, the prime minister has said this vaccine will not be mandatory in Australia, but that doesn't mean that different groups might not mandate it. My advice to people is that this is a really good, safe, effective vaccine. There are very few people who shouldn't be getting it. It is a really good thing to do for your own protection, because we know this is a very infectious virus. And if you don't get vaccinated, there is a real risk, you will get it. I really strongly recommend people get vaccinated rather than be worried about having it mandated for travel or in other circumstances.

Q- The next question is that can a vaccinated person spread the virus?

A- As I mentioned, some really interesting information came out of AstraZeneca from their trials. Around 65% of people were shown that they couldn't spread the virus after vaccination. So, yes, some people who get vaccinated could still get sick or get the virus, but not be sick and spread it. That is why it is really important that everyone get vaccinated to protect themselves as individuals. I don't think people should rely on herd immunity, that will not be as effective as we see with a lot of other vaccines e.g. for measles or polio where in Australia we can rely on herd immunity for those diseases. For covid-19, I personally would not rely on herd immunity. We need to each get ourselves individually vaccinated and protected.

Q- What about the virus mutation? Will the vaccines be effective?

A- So far it looks like the vaccines are effective for the current variants of concern, particularly the B117 that is circulating in the UK and 40 other countries now. It might be a little bit less effective against some of the other variants. More trials are being done on the evolving variants. Today, the most important thing is just to be vaccinated to get protected against the variants that are circulating.

Q- Will there be penalties or legal repercussions for people who choose not to get vaccinated?

A- Oh, no. As I've said, it's not mandatory. The prime minister has been crystal clear on that. At this stage, it's absolutely not mandatory. Down the track, we might start looking at some specific groups, such as health care workers who are looking after Covid patients and situations where there is a lot of exposure to COVID 19. So we'll say for example, if you don't wish to be vaccinated, you're going to have to work in another part of the hospital etc., but this will be in very restricted places. So, no, there will be no penalties for that. I am sure this question is also related to what's happened with parents whose children aren't vaccinated; don't have access to child care payments and things like that. That is a Commonwealth government decision. The prime minister has said that this vaccine will not be mandated. And at this stage, there is no intention until all adults are vaccinated to think about vaccinating children.

Q- The next question is, if you don't have Medicare, can you get vaccinated for free in pharmacies or in GP clinics? And specifically asylum seekers, international students, people on visitor visas?

A- Yes, we want everyone to get vaccinated. So it will be free for everyone. Now, I can't comment on the other groups. I think it will be free even in pharmacies and GP's. But if you don't have a Medicare card, I'm not quite sure how that might work. I will take note of this question and follow up. However, it will absolutely be free at all Queensland Health facilities. Anyone can come forward as long as they are 16 years

of age and over, you're not pregnant, and those other few exceptions. This is just like how people have been coming forward and getting tested for COVID 19.

Q- What about the Johnson and Johnson vaccine? I heard it's safer than the Pfizer vaccine and gives more coverage in one dose. Is this being considered?

A- It is going to be rolled out, I understand, privately. People will be able to purchase from around mid-year. So it will be available. It's another very good vaccine. I don't think it's particularly better. It's just excellent. They're all excellent vaccines. Once the TGA has approved the vaccine, I can assure people it's absolutely safe and effective. But just go to the first one you're offered, I would recommend very strongly, don't wait because you think there might be something better.

Q- There was some questions about how it's being rolled out in remote rural communities

A-In remote and rural communities, they will not get the Pfizer vaccine because there is no way we can safely distribute it because the vaccine is very fragile and has to be maintained at that low temperature. AstraZeneca vaccine will be the one going out to these areas after its approval from TGA.

Q- That is the next question is relating to the antivaxxers, the communities are getting lots of misinformation from within and also from overseas. What steps are being taken to counter this or what advice can you give us on how to manage these?

A- You would have seen the roll out of the Commonwealth ad campaign. We are getting out there, the Prime Minister, the Premier, myself and everyone involved. We are telling people to go to the Australian government website to get your legitimate information about vaccination. Don't go to Facebook or to people who don't know what they're talking about. We have to remember, they get a lot of air time but in actual fact, they're quite a small group. More than 95 per cent of our kids in Queensland are fully vaccinated. And I think that's an absolutely amazing response from the parents. Remember that the antivaxxers are a very small group, but a very noisy group. So we need to listen to what they're saying and counteract what they're saying. But I'm not particularly worried about them.

Q- I think that the other question is, is it possible that clinics are run at other settings, for example, churches or community halls to encourage multicultural community people to be vaccinated at their own community places?

A- Yeah, we're looking at that. It's a little bit difficult because these places don't necessarily have all of the things we need in place to be able to do it. But, yes, it's been looked at. I meet once a week with the people who are rolling out their program in the UK. They have rolled it out in mosques and cathedrals and different places of worship to really engage. So it's definitely something we're looking at. Whether we'll be able to do that, I'm not quite sure. We will work it through and communicate any updates.

Q- Is there any chance that a person can get covid-19 after getting the vaccine?

A- Yes, they can, because it isn't 100% effective. No vaccine is 100% effective. We need as many people vaccinated as possible to decrease the amount of virus circulating and decrease the severity of the disease. In addition, apply the other strategies of social distancing, staying home for those who are sick etc. The other issue, of course, is that you need time after you've been vaccinated to be protected. For this vaccine, you need to get full protection as much as possible and that's why you need to have that second dose. Once you get the dose, you have to wait for your immune system to respond. In terms of getting COVID 19 from the actual vaccine, one cannot get Covid directly from the vaccine injection. The vaccine is made of a dead virus therefore cant infect people.

Q- Once vaccinated, do you still need to get Covid tests if you get sick?

A- If you get sick, you still need to get tested.

Q- Can vaccinated Australian residents who want to travel overseas, avoid hotel quarantine upon return?

A- That decision hasn't been discussed. We will need a lot of people to be vaccinated before we can start talking about that. At this stage, the prime minister has said that it's unlikely that the international border will open before the end of the year, which means that anyone coming in will still be required to quarantine and it is unlikely that people will be given permission to leave Australia. Knowing that, of course, people who have dual citizenship and dual passports can leave on the non-Australian passport, but then they might have problems getting back in depending on the situation.

Q- Still related to travel and borders re-opening, is there a specific level of amount of vaccinations administered that will enable Australia borders to be reopened?

A- That is the plan and that that is what the Commonwealth will work through. They make the decision about international borders. It will depend on a lot of things and not just the vaccine. Travels will also depend on the variants that are circulating and how effective the vaccine is against that. It also depends on what therapeutics are available and this is being looked through many trials. Plus there is the fact that the rest of the world is vaccinating. So international travels will depend on a lot of variables.

Q- We know that not all residents of Australia are willing to get the vaccine. So why buy the big quantity of doses and spend that much money on unutilized doses?

A- At the moment, the Commonwealth has purchased 53 million doses of the AstraZeneca and Australia has approximately 25 million people. That's the amount for each person. We are not sure if we will get all the Pfizer vaccine, because that needs to be imported from overseas, whereas we know we'll get the AstraZeneca because it will be made locally by CSL. It's not that expensive a vaccine to make. In fact, the most expensive part of all of this is the delivery. It's getting the vaccine from CSL to sites across Australia and then for doctors and pharmacists and nurses to give it to people, that's the most expensive part. The cost of the actual vaccine is not that expensive. I am not sure about this but I suspect the Commonwealth would also be looking at what help they might be able to give surrounding Pacific countries so the vaccine does not get wasted. I don't think we can guarantee that we'll get all the Pfizer vaccine, in which case we will need every dose of that AstraZeneca vaccine.

Q- Obviously, there are many questions coming through, so similar to other vaccines, such as yellow fever vaccines, if you don't have proof of vaccination, you can be forced at some airports to take the second shot, would this vaccine have a negative reaction if you took another shot of the same vaccine or a different brand.

A- No, they wouldn't, but I don't think that will be happening. We are using the Australian Immunisation Register here in Australia to capture all this data and people will be able to access it themselves and be able to see it. If someone has had the vaccine overseas, they won't be coming into Australia and getting it at the airport. That will be sorted out before they come in.

Follow up after forum

The Chief Health Officer has responded to the below questions from the forum:

1. Whether people without a Medicare card could access free vaccine.

RESPONSE: Yes, but they will need to go to a QH clinic or one of the Commonwealth Government vaccine clinics that are going to replace the respiratory clinics. They won't be able to access GP surgeries or Pharmacies.

2. Whether the vaccine is Halal and Kosher.

RESPONSE: Yes. Further follow up will be done with the Commonwealth to put together some statements. Some other useful resources include:

- COVID Conspiracy Replies from the British Islamic Medical Association - click [here](#).
- A statement regarding COVID-19 Vaccination from Muslim Health Professionals Australia- [here](#).
- A statement regarding Pfizer Vaccine from the British Islamic Medical Association- [here](#).

Other useful links

The Department of Health has developed and translated a number of communication resources for multicultural communities with information on the national COVID -19 vaccines rollout, including fact sheets, videos and audio files.

[Link to all resources](#)