

The Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation
Department of Health
GPO Box 9848
Canberra ACT 2601

14 April 2022

Via email: enquiries@health.gov.au

Dear ATAGI,

Re: Response to ATAGI advice on use of sedation for COVID-19 vaccination

Australian Medical Professionals Society (AMPS) members have raised concerns about advice released by ATAGI on April 6 2021 regarding the use of sedation to assist in the safe administration of COVID-19 vaccines.¹ AMPS is seeking urgent clarification concerning the language, definitions and safety of advice provided.

We note that ATAGI has outlined the importance of informed consent. Informed valid consent as outlined in the Australian Immunisation Handbook being²:

Criteria for valid consent

For consent to be legally valid, the following elements must be present:

1. It must be given by a person with legal capacity, and of sufficient intellectual capacity to understand the implications of receiving a vaccine.
2. It must be given voluntarily in the absence of undue pressure, coercion or manipulation.
3. It must cover the specific procedure that is to be performed.
4. It can only be given after the potential risks and benefits of the relevant vaccine, the risks of not having it, and any alternative options have been explained to the person.

Understanding what is required for valid informed consent raises a couple of issues with the recent ATAGI advice. These include issues of coercion, the concept of opportunistic administration and potential risks of the relevant vaccine. Given ATAGI states, *there are no best practice guidelines currently available specifically for vaccination under sedation*, on what evidentiary foundation is this advice based on?

ATAGI states Covid-19 gene-based *Vaccines may also be administered opportunistically while patients are undergoing sedation for unrelated procedures*. The meaning of opportunistic needs to be clearly explained to ensure people are not injected against their will under any coercion or manipulation. We note ATAGI have stated *Sedation should not be used as a measure to enforce compliance*, this however does not instil peace of mind under current government behaviour.

¹ [ATAGI advice on use of sedation for COVID-19 vaccination \(health.gov.au\)](https://www.health.gov.au/technical-advice-on-use-of-sedation-for-covid-19-vaccination)

² <https://immunisationhandbook.health.gov.au/vaccination-procedures/preparing-for-vaccination#accordion-para-11276-189034>

Financial coercion appears to be acceptable to our current regulatory agencies and government, *to enforce compliance with vaccination requirements*. Therefore, how can the Australian public trust medical coercion will not be used to encourage vaccination while sedated. There is a real possibility under this current wording and the current state of politics in this country that denial of ongoing medical treatment could be used to ensure opportunistic consent from family or a substitute decision-maker is provided.

Additionally, given we have been advised that the Department of Child Safety is prepared to use legislation to override the vaccination wishes of biological parents whose children are subject to a child protection order, how can any parent have confidence their child will not be opportunistically injected with a gene-based vaccine while sedated? These are serious questions that the public no longer has confidence in ATAGI to answer.

Furthermore, The ATAGI advice provides almost contradictory statements with limited if any concrete evidence based foundations to the guidelines which is of grave concern to our medical professionals. Valid consent can only be given after the potential risks and benefits of the relevant vaccine, the risks of not having it, and any alternative options have been explained to the person ³. How can any medical professional clearly discuss the potential risks when as the ATAGI advice states, *there are no data on the safety of specific sedative agents given concurrently with any specific vaccine, there are also no theoretical safety concerns*.

So while the advice states, *ATAGI considers all COVID-19 vaccines currently registered in Australia to be safe and suitable for administration under sedation*, there is actually no current data to support that statement.

ATAGI then outlines, *COVID-19 vaccines can be co-administered with other vaccines if required, including influenza and routine childhood and adolescent vaccines*. Given medicine is usually evidence based, our members noted the advice states, *there is limited evidence on the safety and effectiveness of co-administering COVID-19 vaccines at the same time as other vaccines*.

The ATAGI advice on the use of sedation for COVID-19 vaccination reviewed above raises some serious concerns that must immediately be addressed by ATAGI.

1. *Given there are no best practice guidelines currently available specifically for vaccination under sedation*, on what evidentiary foundation is this safety advice based?
2. How can ATAGI guarantee coercion will not be used as a means to enforce vaccination compliance?
3. How can ATAGI reassure parents their wishes will never be overridden by a substitute decision-maker such as the Chief Executive of the Department of Child Safety?
4. It appears from this document there is almost no objective data or scientific evidence base for the advice, how then can ATAGI recommend vaccination under sedation is safe?

The aim of this advice by ATAGI was to *provide an overview of the principles for the use of sedation as one of a range of measures to assist in the safe administration of COVID-19 vaccines*. A brief overview of the document clearly demonstrates an apparent absence of scientific evidence to support the safety claims. Furthermore, the opportunistic language is

³<https://immunisationhandbook.health.gov.au/vaccination-procedures/preparing-for-vaccination#accordion-para-11276-189034>

causing distress and unease among our membership and the wider public. It is ATAGI's responsibility to ensure definitions cannot be abused and adults or children medically assaulted via invalid informed consent.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely

The Australian Medical Professional Society
The Nursing Professional Association Australia