



## **COVID-19 VACCINATION POLICY FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

### **What is the COVID-19 vaccination policy?**

Bowls Tasmania has decided that it needs to lead the way and provide direction to regions and clubs regarding compulsory COVID-19 vaccinations. Accordingly it is Bowls Tasmania policy effective from 1 February 2022 that:

- Players must be fully vaccinated (at least two doses) against COVID-19 to be selected to play in State teams.
- Players in Bowls Tasmania championships must be fully vaccinated (at least two doses) and must show proof of vaccination to be eligible to play.
- Players in Bowls Tasmania State Wide Challenge games must be fully vaccinated (at least two doses) and must show proof of vaccination to be eligible to play.

Bowls Tasmania has granted exemptions to the above as follows:

- Players will not have to be vaccinated against COVID-19 if they can provide a written exemption signed by a qualified medical practitioner.
- Junior players will not have to be fully vaccinated (at least two doses) until 30 June 2022.

Bowls Tasmania has strongly recommended to regions and clubs that they follow the above policy regarding all bowls under their jurisdictions. (All three regions have agreed to implement this policy effective from 1 February 2022.)

### **Why is this policy in place?**

When Tasmania had its borders closed, the impact of COVID-19 was under control. The opening of our borders in December 2021 has created a far greater exposure to us than we have seen at any time in the pandemic. We are in the grip of another wave of the disease that is more contagious than any of the strains before it. Case numbers in Tasmania have increased significantly and we must do all within our powers to stop the spread of the disease and to protect our members and the community in helping curb this outbreak. This policy decision has been taken after careful consideration - with the health and welfare of our members and the community of the foremost concern. Given all facts available, vaccination is our best defence against this latest outbreak.

### **What is meant by fully vaccinated?**

Fully vaccinated means at least two doses of an approved COVID-19 vaccination. At this stage players do not have to have the booster dose to be deemed to be fully vaccinated, however, Bowls Tasmania strongly recommends that players receive their booster dose when they are eligible to do so.

### **What is the benefit of having all players vaccinated?**

Over 98% of Tasmanians have had their first vaccination and over 95% have had their second vaccination. Both vaccinated and unvaccinated people can pass on the virus, and both can suffer effects from the virus. However, the purpose of the vaccine is to reduce the impact of the virus on a person's health.

All the health advice tells us that vaccination is the best way to protect our community and to slow the spread of the disease. It also plays a vital part in ensuring our vital infrastructure such as health, transport, and essential services are not brought to a standstill by the spread of the disease.

### **What if players do not want to be vaccinated?**

Players do not have to be vaccinated if they do not want to – the policy does not force anyone to be vaccinated against their wishes. Vaccinations in Australia are voluntary, and it is up to individual players to make the choice whether to vaccinate or not. However, that choice now has consequences and one of those consequences is the inability for them to play pennant and championship bowls from 1 February 2022.

### **Why has Bowls Tasmania changed the rules half-way through the season?**

The pandemic has thrown us many challenges and has the habit of changing daily. When Tasmania had its borders closed, the impact of COVID-19 was under control. The opening of our borders in December 2021 has created a far greater exposure to us than we have seen at any time in the pandemic. We now see ourselves in the grip of another wave of the disease that has proven to be more contagious than any of the strains before it. Case numbers in Tasmania have increased significantly and we must do all within our powers to stop the spread of the disease and to protect our members and the community in helping curb this outbreak. This decision has been taken after careful consideration and with the health and welfare of our members and the community of the foremost concern. Given all facts available, vaccination is our best defence against this latest outbreak. Waiting until the end of the season to introduce this policy may have been too late.

### **Are there any exemptions?**

Bowls Tasmania has granted exemptions to being fully vaccinated (at least two doses) as follows:

- Players will not have to be vaccinated against COVID-19 if they can provide a written exemption signed by a qualified medical practitioner.
- Junior players will not have to be fully vaccinated (at least two doses) until 30 June 2022.

### **How can players get an exemption?**

If a player cannot get any of the approved COVID-19 vaccines for medical reasons, their doctor will need to update their record on the Australian Immunisation Register (AIR) to say they have a medical contraindication and can't receive the vaccine. This will then be reflected on their Immunisation History Statement and their COVID-19 Digital Certificate. They can show their certificate as proof of their vaccination exemption status and add it to the Check-In TAS on their mobile device.

An exemption form is available from the <https://www.coronavirus.tas.gov.au/> website.

A copy of the exemption form can also be downloaded from the Bowls Tasmania website – Go to Club Help Desk – Coronavirus (COVID-19) or click on the following link: <https://www.bowlstasmania.com.au/coronavirus-covid-19/>.

### **Why have junior players been given an exemption until 30 June 2022?**

Junior players under the age of eighteen, and particularly those under the age of twelve, have not had the same opportunity or timeframe to get vaccinated as the adult population has. Junior players under eighteen had to wait until the adult population had been vaccinated before they could receive their two doses. Junior players aged between five and eleven have only had the opportunity to get their first dose from 10 January 2022 and must wait eight weeks after their first dose until they can receive their second dose and thereafter be deemed to be fully vaccinated. It would have been totally unfair to have banned junior players from BTAS events or pennant when most had no chance of being fully vaccinated by 1 February 2022.

### **Is this legal when the Tasmanian Government has not mandated compulsory vaccination for sports teams? Is this discrimination?**

Vaccinations in Australia are voluntary, and it is up to individual players to make the choice whether to vaccinate or not. However, there are consequences for players who choose not to vaccinate and one of those consequences is the inability to play pennant and championship bowls.

On the other hand, individual organisation's and entity's have the right to stipulate the requirements of people who wish to participate in that organisation's / entity's activities.

BTAS has opted to make vaccination a condition of playing bowls to exercise its duty of care to protect its members, the majority of whom fall into a vulnerable cohort due to their age, as well as to protect business continuity and keep the community safe.

The Commonwealth Games Association has mandated full vaccination for anyone picked in their teams – thereby setting a precedent for amateur sports people.

Bowls SA has already implemented a “no jab no play” policy.

Bowls WA has advised that the WA Government has mandated that all patrons to bowls clubs (including playing surfaces and surrounds) must be fully vaccinated from 31 January 2022.

Bowls Australia legal counsel has no issues with the policy.

#### **Do regions and clubs have to adopt this policy?**

Regions and clubs do not have to adopt this policy. However, Bowls Tasmania has strongly recommended to regions and clubs that they follow the policy regarding all bowls under their jurisdictions. (All three regions have agreed to implement this policy effective from 1 February 2022.)

#### **What proof of vaccination is required?**

Acceptable evidence of vaccination status is:

- The COVID-19 digital certificate on the Check-In TAS app; or
- An Immunisation History Statement from the Australian Immunisation Register; or
- An equivalent document from a jurisdiction outside Australia that is recognised by the Australian Government or Director of Public Health.

#### **Whose responsibility is it to check and record vaccination status?**

In relation to BTAS run events and competitions, vaccination status for players who do not play pennant will be checked on arrival at the registration area.

It will be the responsibility of clubs to ensure that all their selected pennant players conform to this policy and that proof of vaccination, or exemption, has been provided to the club in all instances.

Breaches of this policy will be dealt with under relevant Conditions of Play and Section 39 of the Laws of the Sport of Bowls.

**How will players know that players from other clubs are fully vaccinated?**

It will be the responsibility of clubs to ensure that all their selected pennant players conform to this policy and that proof of vaccination, or exemption, has been provided to the club in all instances.

**What happens if a club does not confirm the vaccination status of its members?**

That would be entirely a club decision, but if they did not wish to confirm the vaccination status of their members, the likely consequence is that they would be excluded from the pennant competition completely.

**Will vaccination status be recorded and where?**

The information that will be collected is simply evidence of vaccination status and is no more than is collected every time players sign in using their Check-In TAS app.

Bowls Link has been set up to record that a player's status has been sighted using the certificate feature of the system. Access to this information will only be possible in accordance with the Federal and State legislation.

BTAS and clubs must aim to limit the collection, use and disclosure of personal information to what is necessary to prevent and manage COVID-19, and must take reasonable steps to keep personal information secure. The only thing that needs to be recorded is that the proof of vaccination was sighted. This is the same way Working with Vulnerable People checks are handled within BTAS and the Regions.

**Who will have access to players vaccination status?**

Access will be limited to as few people as possible and will only be provided to those with responsibility for gathering the information or using the information to administer the sport in accordance with the policy. Those with access will be given Bowls Link administrator access.

**Should BTAS, regions and clubs be asking for and keeping copies of vaccination records?**

No due to privacy legislation. The only thing to be recorded is that the proof of vaccination was sighted.

**Will players have to show a valid proof of vaccination when they arrive to play in an event or pennant?**

In relation to BTAS run events and competitions, vaccination status for players who do not play pennant will be checked on arrival at the registration area.

In relation to pennant, it is the responsibility of clubs to ensure that all their selected pennant players conform to this policy and that proof of vaccination, or exemption, has been provided to the club in all instances. No proof will have to be shown on arrival to play pennant.

**What happens if I forget to bring or don't have evidence on me when asked? Can I produce evidence later? Will I have to forfeit my game?**

Pennant players who have provided proof of vaccination to their club do not have to provide evidence when visiting another club. However, if it is suspected that a player has breached this policy, the breach should be reported to the Controlling Authority who will then seek proof of vaccination from that player's club.

Non-pennant playing players will have to produce evidence of vaccination when asked. Refusal to do so or an inability to do so will result in the player being asked to leave and the appropriate penalties in accordance with Conditions of Play will apply.

**The timing of this announcement to when players must be double vaccinated does not allow time for those who are single vaccinated to book and receive a second vaccination. How do we account for players in this situation?**

Bowls Tasmania believes that the majority of members have had ample time to be double vaccinated. This policy was announced early in January 2022. Second doses are now available three weeks after the first dose so players will miss very few championships or pennant games if they act swiftly.

**If a player is not vaccinated, can they play in an event or in pennant if they can show proof of the date of their second vaccination dose?**

No – only fully vaccinated players are permitted to play after 1 February 2022.

**How do clubs or players report breaches and concerns regarding this policy?**

If it is suspected that a player has breached this policy, the breach should be reported to the Controlling Authority who will then seek proof of vaccination from that player's club.

**What happens if a player who is not vaccinated plays in breach of this policy?**

Breaches of this policy will be dealt with under relevant Conditions of Play and Section 39 of the Laws of the Sport of Bowls.

**Does this policy impact on how clearances are handled?**

No, each member has their own unique membership number / national ID. When a member moves from one club to another all their data is retained within their membership on Bowls Link.

**Regions have been trying to introduce changes to pennant competitions to try to attract new players to the game. How does excluding some current and future players align with this policy?**

Bowls Tasmania believe it will be even harder to attract new players to the game without the policy. Bowls Tasmania believes that, by not introducing such changes, we risk the cancellation of the whole competition such as was the case in early 2020.

**What will be the impact on bowling numbers in Tasmania by removing unvaccinated players?**

It is unknown at this early stage of the policy, however, it is likely that there will be a small reduction in bowling numbers. Bowls Tasmania believe that there would have been a much bigger reduction in bowling numbers if the policy had not been introduced.

**What happens if a club is unable to field a team or a number of teams because of the introduction of this policy or due to the impact of COVID-19?**

Should clubs be in the position of not being able to field teams in their lowest division due to COVID-19 issues, a forfeit will not be recorded, and match points will be shared.

**Why does the policy not cover social and club events?**

It is up to the individual club to determine whether to mandate vaccines for these activities. BTAS has written to all clubs encouraging them to adopt the policy, however, it is up to individual clubs to determine if they are going to apply the policy to such activities.

**Do barefoot bowlers and social bowlers need to be vaccinated?**

It is up to the individual club to determine whether to mandate vaccines for these activities. BTAS has written to all clubs encouraging them to adopt the policy, however, it is up to individual Clubs to determine if they are going to apply the policy to such activities.

**Does the policy apply to spectators?**

The policy does not apply to spectators unless the Club where an event is being played has a compulsory vaccination mandate.

**How do we handle and support those who are not vaccinated?**

Be supportive and gentle, respecting the person's choice to not get vaccinated, while also explaining that the age demographic of the bowls community makes it particularly vulnerable to severe consequences from COVID-19. The policy was implemented by BTAS to ensure the health and safety of bowlers. Should a situation escalate, the Bowls Australia Member Protection Policy applies.

**What do we do if this policy results in some poor behaviour due to differing viewpoints?**

Should a situation escalate, the Bowls Australia Member Protection Policy applies.

**How does this policy align with the email sent from Bowls Tasmania in December 2021 advising that clubs are exempt from Tasmanian Government requirements that staff and patrons must be fully vaccinated in those areas of a club where alcohol is served?**

The Tasmanian Government has determined that staff and patrons of sporting groups are exempt from the requirement to be fully vaccinated in those areas where alcohol is served. Notwithstanding that determination, Bowls Tasmania has determined otherwise in relation to players playing bowls.

**As this policy is being implemented mid-season, will anyone who has registered for a BTAS event prior to 7 January 2022 and is not vaccinated receive a full refund for their competition entry fees?**

Yes. This will be processed upon notification to BTAS, and a refund will be issued through Bowls Link system.



<b>Will Bowls Tasmania give refunds to players who are not vaccinated and will be prevented from playing the rest of the season?</b>
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No. Bowls Tasmania raises its affiliation fees from the regions based on a fixed fee and not on a per capita basis.

<b>How long will the policy be in force for?</b>
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Bowls Tasmania is constantly monitoring the COVID-19 situation on a regular basis and will review the policy as required. The policy will be reviewed regardless before 30 June 2022.

The pandemic has thrown us many challenges and has the habit of changing daily. This document will be amended and added to at any time in the future if other frequent questions are asked.

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**Approved by BTAS Board**

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**Prepared by:**

BTAS CEO