

**Australian Medical Association Limited**

ABN 37 008 426 793

42 Macquarie Street, Barton ACT 2600: PO Box 6090, Kingston ACT 2604  
 Telephone: (02) 6270 5400 Facsimile (02) 6270 5499  
 Website : <http://www.ama.com.au/>



**Transcript:** AMA President, Dr Omar Khorshid, Outlet, *Radio National Breakfast with Sally Sara*, Friday, 19 March 2021

**Subject: Phase 1b of COVID-19 vaccine rollout commencing in GP practices next week**

---

**SALLY SARA:** Well, on Monday, more than six million Australians will become eligible to receive their COVID-19 vaccine, but there are already serious problems with the rollout. Many GPs were caught off guard by the Federal Government's announcement that they were taking bookings, and some are still waiting to be told just how many doses of the vaccine they will receive. The Phase 1B rollout includes people aged over 70, Indigenous Australians aged over 55, younger adults with a medical condition and workers deemed to be critical or high risk.

Joining us now is the President of the Australian Medical Association, Dr Omar Khorshid. Omar, welcome back to RN Breakfast.

**OMAR KHORSHID:** Good morning Sally.

**SALLY SARA:** Well, firstly, we've had news from Europe overnight where the medicines regulator has dismissed concerns over safety of the AstraZeneca vaccine. Can Australians be confident in the safety of this vaccine?

**OMAR KHORSHID:** Australians absolutely can be confident in the safety of both of the vaccines that are available to us, the Pfizer vaccine and the AstraZeneca vaccine. And the news overnight really puts to bed concerns that there may be increased rates overall of different types of thrombosis or blood clotting as a result of the vaccine. They have pointed out that there's a couple of very rare types of clotting that are- do seem to be at a slightly higher rate than you would expect in the population. But we're talking risks of under one per million doses- one per million people. And those are very, very rare side effects of any medical treatment.

**SALLY SARA:** Dr Khorshid, back home on the home front, the Federal Government's website went live on Wednesday listing GP clinics and in some cases allowing users to book their appointments. But some GP's were unprepared for the flood of calls. Has the rollout been rushed?

**OMAR KHORSHID:** The rollout hasn't been rushed because, of course, we've been preparing for some time. But there has been a change in focus of the program to- from what was going to be a small number of big vaccination centres and going towards a model we support, which is actually the majority of general practices being involved over time. And that means spreading the vaccine out amongst more practises, and each practice gets, unfortunately, less of the vaccine.

There's only 200,000 doses available next week. That's just the reality of importing a vaccine from overseas. But we're certainly hoping that as the Australian production becomes available, which should be over the next week or so, that those numbers can ramp up and it'll be possible for Australians to actually go to their GP and get their vaccine.

**SALLY SARA:** What are the concerns that are being raised with you from GPs? What are you hearing?

**OMAR KHORSHID:** So, the biggest concern at the moment is those practises who are really keen to get involved. Some of them have made significant investments in vaccine fridges and staffing, getting ready for a big vaccine rollout. And some of those are really quite shocked and surprised to find out they would- initially, they thought they were getting only around 100 vaccines. And then because there's only 8 per vial instead of 10 per vial, which will be the Australian numbers, it's dropped down for some of them to 80, which is a pretty small number if you've got thousands of patients on your books. And so, that's the main concern. There are some other concerns being expressed to us around the booking systems and the phone lines being clogged by patients who are very eager.

It's great that Australians are so keen to access the vaccine, but unfortunately, with the way the announcements were made, GPs just weren't ready for the phone calls. And some of them found their phone lines were blocked for several hours on the day of the announcement.

**SALLY SARA:** Could the Federal Government have handled this better?

**OMAR KHORSHID:** Look, we've certainly given feedback to the government, as have many other groups, that perhaps they should have been a little bit more clear with the public that actually this is a really slow start to the rollout, that 6.5 million people can't have their vaccine in the first week when we've only got 200,000 doses. So, perhaps it would have been better to say, look, let the practices contact you and give the GPs the opportunity to determine for themselves who are their highest risk patients, who should they focus on in this first couple of weeks?

But the genie is out of the bottle now. And really, what we're saying to the Australian public is be patient, please be understanding of the fact that your GPs are trying their best to participate in this program and to do their bit to help get us out of this crisis. But it will take time to get even just this Phase 1B completed.

**SALLY SARA:** Why do this through GP clinics? Why not maximise economies of scale and have big vaccination centres where it can be done en masse?

**OMAR KHORSHID:** Look, I think we'll end up doing all of those things, Sally. We support the GP model because there are thousands of practices ready, willing and able to participate. They're highly experienced at vaccination and they already know who their patients are, in particular, in this 1B phase. They know who is on the books and normally receives the flu vaccine, which is very similar to the group- highest priority for the COVID vaccine.

So, for all those reasons, the GP roll out makes sense. But of course, we do need to supplement that with other options. And there will be GP respiratory clinics, which are run by the Commonwealth government, as well as down the track state vaccination centres, which will be that mass vaccination centre model, particularly for those people who don't have a regular GP.

**SALLY SARA:** Dr Khorshid, RN Breakfast spoke to the manager of one GP surgery, which has decided not to take part in the rollout despite having 4000 patients eligible under Phase 1B. Here's Penny Mills, who manages the practice in Sydney's inner west.

Don't have that audio there... Dr Khorshid- let's hear that audio now.

**[Excerpt]**

**PENNY MILLS:** We've only got the capacity to vaccinate 60 to 100 patients per week. We'd be vaccinating right through to the end of the year, if not later. We don't actually have the workforce or the space, nearby parking or any of those other things that seem to be very important for the vaccine to be safely administered.

**[End of excerpt]**

**SALLY SARA:** That is GP practice manager in Sydney's inner west, Penny Mills. Dr Khorshid, that surgery isn't taking part in the rollout, but do GPs who are involved face similar capacity and just practical workforce problems?

**OMAR KHORSHID:** They do, Sally, and that is why we were supportive of the government's plan to actually roll it out to more practices so that each practice that is participating wouldn't be overwhelmed and being expected to deliver thousands of vaccine doses per week somehow, whilst also providing their normal general practice care in their normal building with their normal staff.

This rollout, although it does seem to be painfully slow, is not going to test the GP practices' capacity in terms of waiting rooms and staff the way that a mass vaccination centre model would have. So, we're confident that the 5500 practices that put up their hand do have the capacity to do it. 4500 of those will be coming online over the next month or so. And I think, to be frank, the biggest roadblock we have, the thing that's slowing us down is actually vaccine availability. It's not the capacity of general practice to deliver. And the more vaccine we can get produced or imported into Australia, the quicker we can get it into people's arms.

**SALLY SARA:** Dr Omar Khorshid, thank you for joining us again on RN Breakfast.

---

19 March 2021

CONTACT: 0427 209 753 [media@ama.com.au](mailto:media@ama.com.au)

Follow the AMA Media on Twitter: [http://twitter.com/ama\\_media](http://twitter.com/ama_media)

Follow the AMA President on Twitter: <http://twitter.com/amapresident>

Like the AMA on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/AustralianMedicalAssociation>