



# FINAL REPORT

## Meat Industry Covid-19 Vaccination Education awareness, Communication strategy and Support Plans to improve uptake of the vaccine.

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## **1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Workers in the meat processing industry were identified as a population group at higher risk of COVID-19 disease, based on the experience of outbreaks associated with meat processing facilities in several countries. Under the Australian national COVID-19 vaccination policy, workers in the meat processing industry are specifically included among the priority groups eligible for vaccination in Phase '1b' of the vaccine roll out.

It was understood early in the process that an effective, active management and approach to vaccination to the red meat industry was important to ensure the best possible outcome for each plant and the industry as a whole. In early April 2021, a project was approved to provide Vaccination Support to the Meat Industry.

A Strategic Plan was developed and provided to health authorities and industry. The overall objective of the Plan is to ensure that workers in the meat industry are effectively protected against COVID-19 disease, that workplaces remain safe and healthy, and that the broader community benefits from a meat industry free of COVID-19.

Plants have indicated varying levels of vaccination rates so far with many reflecting it has been a slow process, with 15% workforces being complete with others able to implement more targeted approaches indicating projected numbers of 80% or greater. Vaccination hesitancy and access to vaccine, in certain areas, appear to be the drivers of the low numbers impacting industry.

It is recommended that the industry continue to work closely with health authorities and experts to stay abreast of any updates and evolving health and safety responses. Ongoing engagement with state health authorities is essential to continue to develop and implement planning options for the immunisation process and identifying further solutions for vaccination of workers.

In order to assist in addressing vaccination hesitancy and address the identified gap in Risk Communications across Australia's vaccination program, an industry risk communication strategy was seen as essential; with key messages developed and scheduled to assist manage communications across the industry in preparation and during the roll out of the COVID-19 vaccine. The risk communication strategy developed provided an over-arching approach to communicating effectively on the immunization processes, benefits and specific deliverables, accessible and useable by industry.

The response to the risk communications deliverables included Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ), Vaccination video, Webinar, Industry blog & newsletter input and vaccination related information posters has been positive. It is recommended that the risk communications strategy continue to be used at a plant and industry level to provide a source of truth, based on key messages, use of vaccination champions, and accessing independent experts to provide updates or similar when necessary.

## 2.0 INTRODUCTION

Workers in the meat processing industry were identified as a population group at higher risk of COVID-19 disease, based on the experience of outbreaks associated with meat processing facilities in several countries. Under the Australian national COVID-19 vaccination policy, workers in the meat processing industry are specifically included among the priority groups eligible for vaccination in Phase '1b' of the vaccine roll out.<sup>1</sup>

There is strong interest in the issue of vaccination for workers in the industry across a wide spectrum, from the workers themselves through to individual enterprises and representative groups, and to industry bodies and trade unions. It is very much in the interests of both workers and industry to ensure a healthy workforce and healthy workplace environments, and in the interest of the wider community to ensure the best possible level of protection for this high-risk group.

It was understood early in the process that an effective, active management and approach to vaccination to the red meat industry was important to ensure the best possible outcome for each plant and the industry as a whole. It required the investment of time, effort, and resources by industry bodies and plants to engage and communicate deliberately with health authorities and collaborate with various stakeholders to ensure a coordinated approach and plan.

A Strategic Plan (**Appendix 1**) was developed and provided to health authorities and industry with the overall objective to ensure that workers in the meat industry are effectively protected against COVID-19 disease, that workplaces remain safe and healthy, and that the broader community benefits from a meat industry free of COVID-19.

The Strategic Plan provides for a tiered approach that recognised and built on what has already been accomplished across the country in regards vaccination planning; to provide a level of understanding, approach, and levels of service provision across the industry.

This was supported by a proposed Monitoring & Evaluation strategy for use by industry and specific plants to assist tracking vaccination percentages and rates.

Public Health authorities' interface was an important element of the project with good discussions specifically held with Queensland, Victoria, and Tasmania. There was a good appreciation of the needs of the industry by these bodies and an effort to work together to provide vaccination services. There was also some contact initiated with the remaining States' public health systems although there has been limited overall engagement to date.

Development of a Risk Communication Strategic Industry Plan (**Appendix 2**) was also seen as essential; with key messages developed and scheduled to assist manage communications across the industry in preparation and during the roll out of the COVID-19 vaccine.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.health.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/covid-19-vaccines/getting-vaccinated-for-covid-19/when-will-i-get-a-covid-19-vaccine?gclid=Cj0KCQiApsiBBhCKARIsAN8o\\_4j4qT9xK1hYZj13RtwGE6RiliqPxHKd4qwnigc6kHjuxFwwoFmS4oaAsMyEALw\\_wcB](https://www.health.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/covid-19-vaccines/getting-vaccinated-for-covid-19/when-will-i-get-a-covid-19-vaccine?gclid=Cj0KCQiApsiBBhCKARIsAN8o_4j4qT9xK1hYZj13RtwGE6RiliqPxHKd4qwnigc6kHjuxFwwoFmS4oaAsMyEALw_wcB)

### **3.0 PROJECT OBJECTIVES**

- Developed and outlined plans and options, with responsible officers within the industry and industry bodies, for the roles of industry and businesses in the vaccination rollout to meat industry workers, to enable discussion and engagement with health authorities.
- Interfaced with health authorities and industry in discussions on the vaccination rollout and facilitating the consolidation of joint plans.
- Accessed up to date communications, relevant materials to ensure that industry and its workers are well informed on this important process.
- Advised on the evaluation of the rollout from the point of view of the industry, businesses, and workers, and suggested adjustments or actions to address issues and optimise results in the Industry Strategic Plan.
- Collated statistic information where possible on the vaccine adoption rate and any identified barriers.

### **4.0 METHODOLOGY**

- The adoption process for the project followed a research, communication, development, and implementation process at the National and State level in support and in collaboration with industry and health authorities.
- A reference group approach at the National and State/Territory levels to ensure workable options, plans and communication approaches including representatives of AMPC, AMIC and industry was adopted. This extended to additional stakeholders such as respective health departments including Queensland and Victorian Departments of Health.
- Initial meetings and workshops with industry bodies and public health officials both electronically and in person where appropriate were held. This included an approach at the State level as well as on over-arching level to ensure consistency and transparency.
- Pathways for transitioning into Plant Initiated Projects (PIP) where desired to ensure plant specific requirements and needs were provided for including site specific vaccination plans and communications packages were provided.

## 5.0 PROJECT OUTCOMES

Significant outcomes were accomplished in the short time the project has been in place.

- A project team was established within Respond Global and with Stakeholders including AMIC, AMPC and specific plants. The project team was supported by an Australian based world leading immunization expert ensuring that the approach was based on global standards and experience applied in a local context. The project team met fortnightly to address and progress the project.
- A workshop to discuss the industry wide strategic plan was completed on the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021, with participation from AMIC, AMPC and ten plants from Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland. Continuous active engagement and collaboration with State Health Authorities in Queensland, Victoria and Tasmania progressed and both parties (health and meat industry) gained an understanding of their respective contexts and requirements.
- A final Strategic Plan was developed with industry, AMPC and AMIC, and finalised after wide consultation and submitted to all AMPC members and State Health Departments. Providing a structure for enterprises to be proactive and to reach out to their responsible local health authorities to discuss what options for vaccination of workers might be available and to map out how and when workers can access vaccination.
  - AMPC/AMIC are currently using a monitoring and evaluation questionnaire to determine member vaccination levels on a monthly basis. **(Appendix 7)**
  - The early advice in the vaccination rates indicated that health department supply and vaccination hesitancy impacted the early industry up take. Vaccination rates did show positive improvement in the later part of the project as a result of targeted roll out programs in certain States and Plants getting access to bulk appointments for plant workers as well as the public's increased concern caused by recent COVID-19 outbreaks in Australia.
  - Anecdotal evidence indicates that plant vaccination rates currently range upwards from 15% to the 80% range. This is currently well above Australia's 2.7% vaccination rate of the total population.
- A risk communication plan was developed and provided to AMPC. It provides an overarching approach to communicating effectively on the immunization processes, its benefits and specific activities for AMPC as well as individual plants for implementation.

- Additionally, specific deliverables for risk communications have been developed and provided including:
  - First COVID-19 Vaccination blog published by AMPC with content from Respond Global.
  - COVID-19 Vaccine FAQs. **(Appendix 3)**
  - COVID-19 Vaccination video (Electronic copy with AMPC)
  - COVID-19 Webinar PowerPoint **(Appendix 4)**
  - Vaccination Poster **(Appendix 5)**
  - Vaccine FAQ Poster and Corridor questions. **(Appendix 6)**

## 6.0 DISCUSSION

The industry and individual plants continue to work with health authorities on the vaccination rollout. Plants have reached different levels of success through various options, and this will continue as the public health delivery models continue to evolve.

The recent outbreak and subsequent lockdown in Victoria served as a timely reminder that COVID-19 remains and will continue to remain a national and global disease risk. Recent statistics related to COVID-19 include:

- Confirmed COVID-19 cases have topped 160 million in 15 months, and confirmed deaths have topped 3.3 million.
- In key developed countries (e.g. USA, UK, Italy) with societies and economies very similar to Australia, the confirmed COVID-19 death rate since early 2020 is at or approaching 2,000 per million population, or one in 500 people
- Even in developed countries with good testing and vital statistics systems, it is likely that at least some COVID-19 deaths are being missed.
- In countries with low testing rates and/or weak vital statistics systems, the rate of disease and death may be grossly underestimated (e.g., South Africa, total excess deaths nearly 3 times the number attributed to COVID-19)
- This disease has a very significant public health impact and will remain so.

Vaccination hesitancy in Australia is predominately due to a perceived low risk of an individual getting COVID-19 and conflicting, incorrect information from global and national sources and continues to be a barrier to vaccination rates here. This reaffirms the importance of an ongoing industry risk communications approach.

## **7.0 CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS**

The industry has made good progress in providing a realistic framework for its plants and respective workers to work with public health authorities on vaccination options. It is recommended that the industry continue to work closely with health authorities and experts to stay abreast of any updates and evolving health and safety responses. Ongoing engagement with state health authorities by plants is essential for them to continue to develop and implement immunisation planning options and identifying further solutions for vaccination of workers.

Industry and individual plants providing access to correct, relevant, and current information remains vital to the continued roll-out across the country. It is recommended that the risk communications strategy be used at a plant and industry level to continue to provide a source of truth, based on key messages, vaccination champions and access to independent experts when necessary.

## **8.0 APPENDICES**

The project has provided many outputs including the following:

### **8.1 Appendix 1**

Industry body strategic plan for COVID-19 vaccination

### **8.2 Appendix 2**

Risk Communications Strategy for the Meat Processing Industry

### **8.3 Appendix 3**

FAQ COVID-19 - Version 1

### **8.4 Appendix 4**

AMPC Vaccination Webinar ((PowerPoint (electronic copy of webinar with AMPC))

### **8.5 Appendix 5**

Vaccination Posters

### **8.6 Appendix 6**

Vaccination FAQs Poster - A3 - Respond Global

### **8.7 Appendix 7**

Meat Industry COVID -19 Vaccination: Monitoring & Evaluation Questionnaire