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Australia looks to add local mRNA manufacturing capability

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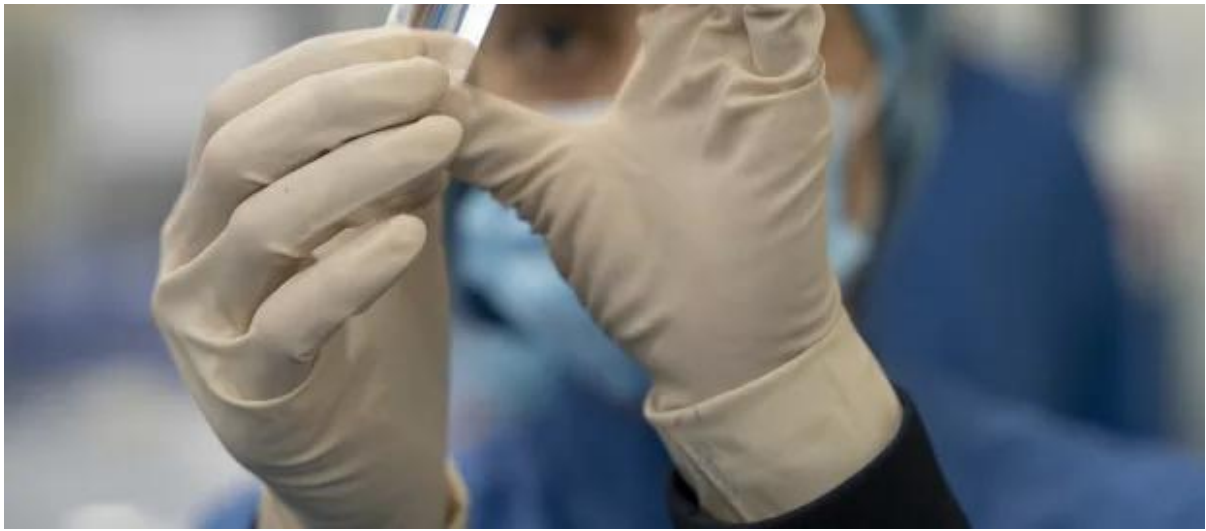
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The manufacture of future COVID-19 vaccine boosters and annual flu shots could be supported by early-stage plans for [domestic production of mRNA vaccines in Australia.](#)

Preliminary discussions and the development of a business case are under way, as the Morrison government faces continued pressure over supply problems related to overseas-produced COVID-19 vaccines.





The locally produced AstraZeneca vaccine is being made by CSL-owned company Seqirus in Melbourne.

A regional manufacturing hub for mRNA vaccine technology products would give Australia capability to make vaccines like the Pfizer and Moderna COVID-19 locally, strengthening the response to future public health emergencies.

Talks about new capability have included representatives of CSL, Pfizer and other drug giants, with consulting giant McKinsey & Co already involved in the business-case process.

CSL is manufacturing the AstraZeneca viral vector vaccine in Melbourne, and could manufacture other vaccine technologies in a new \$800 million facility being built at Tullamarine for subsidiary Seqirus.

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The new facility will be focused on cell-based pandemic and seasonal influenza vaccines, antivenom and Q-Fever vaccine production. Flexibility for other technologies is not yet in place.

CSL is considering mRNA technology for flu jabs, but chief scientific officer Andrew Nash said the company did not currently have capability to manufacture mRNA drugs in Australia.



“Seqirus is currently undertaking pre-clinical work on a next generation mRNA-based flu vaccine, with plans to start clinical trials in the next one to two years,” he said.

“The initial research on mRNA vaccines suggest they might provide an improvement to current influenza vaccines, though more work needs to be done before we can predict the true benefit of mRNA vaccination in this disease.

“We continue to have conversations with the Australian government about how we can support Australia’s ongoing vaccination rollout needs, while we meet our commitments to manufacture AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccines.”

Health Minister Greg Hunt and Home Affairs Minister Karen Andrews have talked up the possibility of domestic mRNA capability in recent days, stressing the development would likely take years.

“We do have capability in Australia to manufacture mRNA vaccines,” Ms Andrews told Sky. “We don’t have the capacity to produce at scale at the moment.”

[Opposition health spokesman Mark Butler](#) said the government needed to put

words into action on local mRNA vaccine capability.

“Other countries Germany, for example, decided they wanted to manufacture their own mRNA vaccines in country to be assured of supplies of these state-of-the-art vaccines, and they built a factory in about six months,” he said.

“It’s needed very urgently. These are highly effective vaccines. We know that through the fact that we have a deal with Pfizer, but we’re reliant on suppliers from overseas. We have no deal with Moderna, the other mRNA vaccine.”

Separately, federal and state governments say progress on Australian vaccination certificates is continuing.

The federal government’s rollout of digital proof of vaccination was included on the agenda for last week’s meeting of data and digital ministers. The proof of vaccination process is already accessible through the myGov website and the Medicare Express Plus smartphone app.

Enhancements to the immunisation history statement process have made proof of COVID-19 vaccination clearer and easier to access for individuals, once they have received all required doses of a COVID-19 vaccine.



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The meeting said the development was “an important step in the continued reopening of Australia’s economy”.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison defended the rollout on Monday.

“Our vaccination program has had some early challenges but so have the vaccination programs of almost every country in the world today,” he said.


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