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**VACCINE NEWS PROMISING BUT SAFETY IS KEY**  
*AMA Statement on Vaccination for COVID-19*

Early results of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine trial are promising, and highlight the unprecedented levels of cooperation around the world to defeat the virus, AMA President, Dr Omar Khorshid, said today.

Releasing a new AMA policy statement, Dr Khorshid that winning the trust of the public will be key to the successful rollout of any COVID-19 vaccine in Australia.

“Regulators are working hard to streamline approval processes so that any successful vaccines can be distributed as quickly as possible,” Dr Khorshid said.

“Australia has a strong record on vaccine safety, due in great part to the rigour of the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) in assessing all medications before they are released to the Australian public.

“While we support the TGA’s efforts to speed up its approval processes in this case, given the scale of the pandemic, it must still apply its usual criteria to assess the safety, quality and effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccines.

“This is critical to winning public confidence.”

Instead of making any COVID-19 vaccine compulsory, extensive efforts should be made to foster trust in the community and encourage its voluntary uptake.

“Some people may have concerns about the rapid development of potential COVID-19 vaccines, compared to the traditional vaccination development timeline,” Dr Khorshid said.

“We must also accept that, even if a vaccine is approved, social distancing will be part of our lives for some time yet.

“We do not know how effective the vaccines under development are going to be and, during the early part of any roll-out, the limited available vaccine will need to be prioritised to vulnerable members of the community.

“It will be important that the community understands why some groups might get a vaccine before others, and the AMA has set out the criteria that should be used to guide these decisions.”

Strong planning and coordination between the Commonwealth, States and Territories, and industry stakeholders will be needed for Australia to move forward quickly with any vaccine distribution.

“This planning process must include GPs, who know and understand what is needed at the coal face to roll out a vaccine,” Dr Khorshid said.

“GPs are often an afterthought in government planning processes, and it is critical that policy makers engage early with general practice and incorporate the feedback of GPs into any vaccine strategy.

“General practices should be the primary vehicle for delivering any new vaccine, particularly as it is likely to involve a two-dose regimen and use multi-dose vials – something that requires more skill and training than is available at the shopping centre pharmacy.

“While it will have been extensively trialled and approved, it still will not have the long track record that most vaccines have, so it must be delivered in a medically supervised environment.

“Extensive efforts must be made to foster trust in the community and encourage its voluntary uptake.

“Some people may have concerns about the rapid development of potential COVID-19 vaccines, compared to the traditional vaccination development timeline.

“We must also accept that, even if a vaccine is approved, social distancing will be part of our lives for some time yet.

“We do not know how effective the vaccines under development are going to be and, during the early part of any roll-out, the limited available vaccine will need to be prioritised to certain groups in the community including those who are at greater risk of infection..

“It will be important that the community understands why some groups might get a vaccine before others, and the AMA has set out the criteria that should be used to guide these decisions.

“There is every reason to be optimistic about the prospects of a COVID-19 vaccine, with more than 190 currently at various stages of development.

“However, the community must also understand that its rollout will involve enormous technical and logistical challenges, and will take longer than many people might have come to expect or hope.

“In the meantime, we must all continue to practise the habits and follow the rules that have helped us weather this pandemic much better than almost all other countries.”

The AMA Statement on Vaccination for COVID-19 is available at <https://ama.com.au/articles/ama-statement-vaccination-covid-19>

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