



Primary Care Vaccine Roll-out

Provider Bulletin

25 March 2022

Bulletins provide you with regular updates and guidance on the COVID-19 Vaccination Program.

Key Messages

WINTER PREPAREDNESS

ATAGI Advice on Winter Dose of COVID-19 vaccine

The Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) [recommends](#) an additional dose of COVID-19 vaccine for winter for **selected population groups** (see attached summary and poster) who are at greatest risk of severe illness from COVID-19 and who have received their primary vaccination and first booster dose. These groups include:

- Adults aged 65 years and older
- Residents of aged care or disability care facilities
- People aged 16 years and older with severe immunocompromise (as defined in the 11th February 2022 [ATAGI statement](#) on the use of a 3rd primary dose of COVID-19 vaccine in individuals who are severely immunocompromised)
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 50 years and older

ATAGI recommends the rollout of the **winter dose** for the above groups commence from April 2022 and coinciding with the rollout of the 2022 influenza vaccination program.

The Australian Government has **accepted** this advice and will include the winter dose for recommended people in the COVID-19 Vaccination Program from **4 April 2022**.

The additional winter COVID-19 vaccine dose **can be**:

- given from 4 months or longer after receipt of a previous booster dose of a COVID-19 vaccine OR
- given from 4 months after a confirmed SARS-CoV-2 infection if this has occurred since the previous booster

- In special circumstances, individuals may be able to receive their winter dose at a shorter interval, for example, in vaccination in-reach programs to aged care, disability care or remote communities, where some flexibility of the minimum interval may help vaccinate a larger proportion of individuals
- co-administered with influenza vaccine. However, it is important not to delay the influenza vaccine if an individual is not yet eligible for a second booster COVID-19 vaccine dose

Comirnaty (Pfizer) or Spikevax (Moderna) are the preferred vaccines for this winter dose. Vaxzevria (AstraZeneca) can be used when an mRNA vaccine is contraindicated or a patient declines vaccination with an mRNA vaccine. Nuvaxovid (Novavax) can be used as a booster if no other COVID-19 vaccine is considered suitable for that individual.

Payments for the winter dose will remain the same as for the administration of other booster doses.

ATAGI Booster Advice

ATAGI continues to recommend:

- All individuals aged 16 and older to receive a booster dose of COVID-19 vaccine, 3 months following completion of their primary course. For most individuals this will be a third dose. This booster dose is important for protecting them against COVID-19.
- For any person aged 16 and older who has not received their first booster yet, ATAGI recommends they receive it as soon as possible, 3 months following completion of their primary course.

Protection against infection wanes after the first booster dose. However, protection against severe disease (rather than all infection) is relatively well maintained, especially in young healthy populations.

Primary Care Role

General practices are critical partners in the roll-out of the vaccination program, providing comprehensive immunisation coverage for their local populations. We encourage all practices to continue to support their local Residential Aged Care Facilities and Disability Support Services to provide in-reach services to ensure eligible people received their winter dose of the COVID-19 vaccine. Your PHN can assist in any facilitation or coordination as needed.

Co-administration of COVID-19 vaccination and a flu vaccine

A COVID-19 vaccination and an influenza vaccination **can** be administered at the same time and may be provided to patients during the same attendance. While a medical practitioner is under no obligation to bulk-bill a patient receiving an influenza vaccination, a patient who also receives a COVID-19 booster vaccination as part of the same occasion of care must be bulk-billed for the MBS COVID-19 vaccine suitability assessment component of the overall service.

Further information can be found at: [MBS online - FAQ - Bulk Billed MBS patient COVID-19 Vaccine Suitability Assessment Service](#)

Example

Billing Medicare for a COVID-19 vaccine suitability assessment service that is co-administered with an annual influenza vaccination

Hera is invited to attend her local metropolitan medical practice to receive her annual flu vaccination. Because of the time that has elapsed since she received her second COVID-19 vaccination she is now eligible for a booster, her GP, Dr Wren, recommends that she also have a COVID-19 booster shot. Dr Wren explains that it is no longer necessary to wait two weeks between different types of vaccinations, so Hera agrees to have both vaccinations at the same time.

Dr Wren provides the vaccine suitability assessment service, using MBS item 93644 for a second dose suitability assessment provided in a metropolitan area during business hours. As it is still a requirement that MBS COVID-19 vaccination support services be bulk-billed, Hera does not have to pay a fee for this part of the attendance.

Because Hera attended the practice to receive a booster vaccination, Dr Wren also bills MBS item 93666, for the vaccine booster incentive.

However, Hera is not in one of the categories of patients eligible for a free annual influenza vaccine under the National Immunisation Program, and Dr Wren is not required to bulk bill her for this part of the attendance. Hera is already aware that she will have to pay a co-payment for the flu vaccination.

Dr Wren bills this part of the attendance using MBS item 23, for a level B standard attendance. Hera receives \$39.10 as the Medicare rebate for the service.

If Hera had been an eligible patient under the National Immunisation Program, Dr Wren would not have charged a co-payment for any part of the attendance. Instead, Hera received a bulk-billed COVID-19 vaccine suitability assessment and was charged a co-payment for the influenza vaccination.

VACCINE CLINIC FINDER UPDATE

VCF Update

Updates to the Vaccine Clinic Finder will be released from Friday 25 March 2022 to align with ATAGI advice about winter doses. Please be patient as we work hard to make this information available through the Vaccine Clinic Finder.

VACCINE OPERATIONS CENTRE (VOC) UPDATE

VOC operating hours

From Sunday 3 April 2022 the Vaccine Operations Centre (VOC) will operate from 7am – 8pm AEST every day, including the upcoming Easter and Anzac Day public holidays. Thank you to all those who responded to the operating hour survey and in recognition of our one year anniversary.

Remember you can email the VOC any time at COVID19VaccineOperationsCentre@Health.gov.au.