



Primary Care Vaccine Roll-out

Provider Bulletin

28 February 2023

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

Key Messages

ATAGI UPDATE

Moderna (Spikevax) Bivalent Original/Omicron BA.4-5 COVID-19 vaccine

On 17 February 2023, the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) provisionally **approved** the Moderna's COVID-19 Bivalent (Original/Omicron BA.4/BA.5) booster dose vaccine. Following this the ATAGI has provided the following **recommendations**:

- the Moderna Bivalent BA.4-5 vaccine can be used in eligible adolescents and adults aged 12 years and older who are recommended (or advised to consider) a COVID-19 booster dose according to **ATAGI 2023 Booster Advice**.
- all currently available COVID-19 vaccines are anticipated to provide benefit as a booster dose, however bivalent booster vaccines, including the Moderna Bivalent BA.4-5 vaccine and Pfizer Bivalent BA.4-5 vaccine, are preferred over other vaccines.
- the Moderna Bivalent BA.4-5 vaccine is **not registered** for use in children aged under 12 years or as a primary course vaccination.
 - currently the Pfizer 5-11 years (**orange**) vaccine, is the only **available COVID-19 vaccine** for use in this age group.

The Australian Government will include the Moderna Bivalent BA.4-5 in the COVID-19 Vaccination Program for boosters in people aged 12 years or older from **April 2023**.

All sites currently participating in the COVID-19 Vaccine Program will be onboarded for **Moderna Bivalent BA.4-5** in the coming weeks.

MODERNA UPDATES

Supplies Secured of Moderna Bivalent BA.4-5 Vaccine

The Australian Government has secured 3 million doses of the Moderna COVID-19 Bivalent BA.4-5 vaccine to ensure an adequate portfolio of COVID-19 vaccines is available in Australia.

The Moderna Bivalent BA.4-5 formulation is **not currently available** in Australia. These Moderna doses are expected to be available in Australia from **April 2023**.

These doses will be the first COVID-19 vaccine to be supplied in Australia in **pre-filled syringes** as opposed to vials with multiple doses in them. Pre-filled syringes are widely used across the world for annual flu doses, heparin injections, and an increasing list of injectable therapies across multiple diseases.

HALTON REVIEW INTO COVID-19 VACCINE AND TREATMENT PROCUREMENT

Professor Halton was tasked with forensically examining the procurement arrangements – and ensuring they were fit-for-purpose in light of what we have learned about the COVID-19 pandemic.

The review was commissioned to ensure all eligible people in Australia have access to COVID-19 vaccines and treatments, now and into the future.

The Government has carefully considered Professor Halton's review and fully accepted seven of the eight recommendations contained in her report.

A recommendation relating to the National Medical Stockpile has been partially accepted.

Professor Halton's recommendations included the need for public health campaigns around vaccine uptake, an updated COVID-19 policy framework, the streamlining of advisory structures, a review of vaccine distribution arrangements, and the need to ensure adequate supplies of therapeutics and vaccines across 2023 and 2024.

Professor Halton's report and the Government's response is available [here](#).

MEDICARE SUPPORT FOR COVID-19 VACCINATIONS

From **1 February 2023**, the vaccine suitability assessment MBS items were streamlined and simplified to reflect integration of these services into routine care.

The Remote supervision items (MBS items 93600 and 93661) remain available to continue to ensure access to boosters for those unable to attend a vaccination site. The items allow an appropriately qualified health professional (such as a nurse or Aboriginal Health Worker) to conduct a COVID-19 Vaccine Suitability Assessment on behalf of a General Practitioner (GP) or Other Medical Practitioner (OMP).

See **attached** summary of streamlined MBS items available for 2023 Booster Doses and in-reach services.

Further information on changes can be found [here](#).

UPDATED RESOURCES

Pfizer Bivalent (BA.4-5)

- The **attached Factsheet** provides further information about the Pfizer Bivalent (BA.4-5) 12 years+ (**Grey**) vaccine.
- The **attached Pfizer Bivalent Comparison** poster has been developed to assist sites to distinguish between the two Pfizer Bivalent vaccines.

General

- **Attached FAQ's** for sites administering 2023 Booster Doses.
- The updated **COVID-19 vaccine Comparison Poster** has been developed to help avoid vaccine administration errors.
- The updated **ATAGI Clinical Guidance** has been updated to reflect the ATAGI 2023 booster advice.
- The **attached AIR table** is a reminder of the AIR codes that should be used for COVID-19 Vaccinations.



COVID-19 VACCINATION

2023 BOOSTER DOSE FUNDING

General Practice

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, Disability Support Services and Vulnerable populations 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.

From **1 February 2023**, the vaccine suitability assessment MBS items were streamlined and simplified to reflect integration of these services into routine care.

COVID-19 funding description		MBS Item	Payment	
MBS - business hours - suitability assessment items	GP	MMM1	93644	\$35.05
		MMM2-7	93645	\$38.45
	OMP	MMM1	93646	\$28.15
		MMM2-7	93647	\$34.80
MBS- after hours – suitability assessment items	GP	MMM1	93653	\$47.55
		MMM2-7	93654	\$50.90
	OMP	MMM1	93655	\$38.35
		MMM2-7	93655	\$44.75
MBS - Remote supervision items	GP/OMP	MMM1	93660	\$21.35
		MMM2-7	93661	\$24.40
Flag fall*	GP/OMP	MMM1-7	90005	\$118.15
MBS – in-depth vaccine assessment item **	GP	MMM1-7	10660	\$39.70
	OMP	MMM1-7	10661	\$31.80

* 90005 – flag fall for services in a residential aged care facility, residential disability facility or patient’s home, co-claimed with 93644, 93645, 93646, 93653, 93654, 93655, 93660 or 93661.

** in-depth vaccine suitability assessment services can only be claimed once per patient

MBS COVID-19 vaccine suitability assessment items

The simplified *MBS COVID-19 vaccine suitability assessment items* are categorised by:

- Practitioner (GP/Other Medical Practitioner);
- Location (metropolitan/non-metropolitan);

Flag-fall item

- A flag-fall fee (MBS item 90005) can be claimed for an initial COVID-19 vaccine suitability assessment service conducted in a **residential aged care facility (RACF)**, a **residential disability facility setting** or at a **patient's place of residence**.
- MBS item 9005 must be billed in association with a COVID-19 vaccine suitability assessment service item. If a number of COVID-19 vaccine suitability assessments are being undertaken at the same facility and during the same GP or OMP visit, the item is only applicable to the vaccine suitability assessment provided to the **first** patient seen.
- The item compensates GPs for time spent outside of consulting rooms. Medical practitioners who are employed by RACFs or disability support facility settings cannot claim the flag-fall item.

MBS remote supervision item

MBS items 93600 and 93661 improve access to vaccines for those unable to attend a vaccination site. The items allow an appropriately qualified health professional (such as a nurse or Aboriginal Health Worker) to conduct a COVID-19 Vaccine Suitability Assessment on behalf of a General Practitioner (GP) or Other Medical Practitioner (OMP).

The MBS items:

- are for vaccine suitability assessments provided on behalf of a GP or OMP, who remains responsible for the clinical outcomes of the service;
- can only be claimed for vaccinations provided outside of consultation rooms in a person's place of residence (which may include, but is not restricted to, a residential aged care home or disability care home); and
- cannot be claimed with the in-depth patient assessment item, as this requires a GP or OMP to assess a patient's individual risks and benefits associated with receiving a COVID-19 vaccine



COVID-19 VACCINATION

ATAGI 2023 BOOSTER ADVICE*

ATAGI 2023 Booster Advice		
Age	At risk**	No risk factors
<5 years	Not recommended	
5-17 years	Consider	Not recommended
18-64 years	Recommended	Consider
≥ 65 years	Recommended	

*mRNA bivalent vaccines are preferred for the 2023 booster dose. For ages in which a bivalent vaccine is not approved, **use a vaccine approved for that age group**. A 2023 booster dose should be given 6 months after a person's last dose or confirmed infection (whichever is the most recent).

Includes those with a medical condition that increases the risk of severe COVID-19 illness (refer to **ATAGI clinical guidance), or those with disability with significant or complex health needs, or multiple comorbidities which increase the risk of poor outcomes from COVID-19.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. What if a patient missed one of their COVID-19 vaccine doses, should they receive another one?

- A. ATAGI continues to recommend a primary course¹ of vaccination against COVID-19, followed by a booster dose for those eligible under the updated **2023 booster dose recommendations**.

This is irrespective of how many booster doses a patient has had in the past. We are no longer numbering booster doses and a "catch-up" schedule is not required if they missed a booster dose (i.e. 1st or 2nd booster doses).

If their last COVID-19 vaccine dose or confirmed infection was 6 months ago or longer, and eligible as per the table above, a patient can be given a **2023 booster dose**.

Q. What if a patient has already completed a primary course and received two booster doses, should they receive another one?

- A. ATAGI continues to recommend a primary course of vaccination against COVID-19, followed by a booster dose for those eligible under the updated 2023 booster dose recommendations.

A patient can have a **2023 booster dose** if their last COVID-19 vaccine dose or confirmed infection was 6 months ago or longer, regardless of the number of prior doses received.

Q. My patient is under 65 years of age however wants to receive another COVID-19 booster. Can I give them one?

A. ATAGI advises that all adults aged 18-64 years without risk factors for severe COVID-19 can **consider** a 2023 booster dose if their last COVID-19 vaccine dose or confirmed infection was 6 months ago or longer, regardless of the number of prior doses received, based on an individual risk-benefit assessment with their immunisation provider.

Q. I'm not sure about how many COVID-19 vaccine doses my patient is recommended to have?

A. We are no longer numbering booster doses.

A **2023 booster dose** is recommended for eligible people if their last COVID-19 vaccine dose or confirmed infection was 6 months ago or longer as per the updated **2023 booster dose recommendations**. This is irrespective of how many booster doses a patient has had in the past.

Q. What is the recommended interval between the last COVID-19 vaccine dose or confirmed SARS-CoV-2 infection and the 2023 booster dose?

A. The recommended interval between the last COVID-19 vaccine dose or confirmed SARS-CoV-2 infection and the 2023 booster dose is 6 months or longer (from whichever is the most recent), regardless of the number of prior doses received.

Q. How do I know if a patient has had COVID-19 in the last six months?

A. The patient should be able to tell you if they have had a confirmed case of COVID-19 in the last six months. There are no safety concerns for individuals receiving a COVID-19 vaccine who may have had undetected SARS-CoV-2 infection within the past 6 months. Administrators should use their clinical judgement before vaccinating any patient.

Q. My patient has had COVID-19-like symptoms in the past, but SARS-CoV-2 infection was not confirmed with PCR or RAT. Is it safe for them to have the 2023 booster dose?

A. Although it is recommended to defer vaccination for 6 months following a **confirmed** SARS-CoV-2 infection, with the decrease in testing rates there are likely to have been many people with **undetected** SARS-CoV-2 infection within recent months. There are no safety concerns for individuals receiving a COVID-19 vaccine who may have had undetected SARS-CoV-2 infection within the past 6 months.

Q. How does my patient choose which booster vaccine is most suitable for them?

A. Regarding vaccine choice, all currently available COVID-19 vaccines are anticipated to provide benefit as a booster dose, however bivalent mRNA booster vaccines are preferred over other vaccines. These include: Pfizer Original/Omicron BA.4-5, as well as Pfizer Original/Omicron BA.1 or Moderna Original/Omicron BA.1. You can find the full statement [here](#).

ⁱ Primary course vaccination recommendations

COVID-19 vaccination is recommended for all people aged 5 years or older to protect against COVID-19.

COVID-19 vaccination is recommended for children aged 6 months to under 5 years with severe immunocompromise, disability, and those who have complex and/or multiple health conditions that increase the risk of severe COVID-19.

For most people, a primary vaccination course consists of 2 doses.

A third primary dose is recommended for people aged 6 months or older with severe immunocompromise.

[Clinical recommendations for COVID-19 vaccines](#) | Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care

Pfizer Bivalent COVID-19 Vaccines

	Pfizer Bivalent (BA.4-5) 12 years+	Pfizer Bivalent (BA.1) 18 years+
Targeted variants	Omicron BA.4-5 and Original	Omicron BA.1 and Original
Approved age	12 years and older	18 years and older
Primary dose	No	No
Booster dose	Yes , for individuals aged 12 years and older who are recommended to receive a COVID-19 booster according to the ATAGI 2023 booster advice .	Yes , for individuals aged 18 years and older who are recommended to receive a COVID-19 booster according to the ATAGI 2023 booster advice .
Dose volume	0.3mL	0.3mL
Doses per vial	6	6
Dilution required	No	No
Refrigerated storage time	70 days within the 18-month shelf life	70 days within the 18-month shelf life

Vial and carton



Example thawed use-by date label

Pfizer Bivalent (BA.4-5) 12 years+ (Grey)

Batch: GE3042
Defrost Date: 01/12/2022
Use By Date: 09/02/2023
 Store at 2°- 8°C & protected from light.
DO NOT RE-FREEZE

Pfizer Bivalent (BA.1) 18 years+ (Grey)

Batch: GE3042
Defrost Date: 01/12/2022
Use By Date: 09/02/2023
 Store at 2°- 8°C & protected from light.
DO NOT RE-FREEZE

Useful Resources: [Vaccine Comparison Poster](#) and [ATAGI clinical guidance for COVID-19 vaccine providers](#)

Information current as of 20 February 2023

