

# Flag-Fall Arrangements for COVID-19 Vaccine Suitability Assessment Services

Last updated: 15 June 2021

**PLEASE NOTE:** The new Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) flag fall item is only available to general practitioners (GPs) and other medical practitioners (OMPs) working in a general practice setting.

**Other Medical Practitioner** includes specialist medical practitioners and consultant physicians working in a general practice setting in their capacity as an OMP.

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The Australian Government is committed to offering every person in Australia access to safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines at no cost.

From 14 June 2021, the Australian Government introduced MBS item 90005 to provide a call-out or “flag-fall” fee for general practitioners (GPs) and OMPs who conduct a COVID-19 vaccine suitability assessment service in a residential aged care facility (RACF), a residential disability facility setting or at a patient’s place of residence.

## Flag-Fall Fee

MBS item 90005 provides a flag-fall fee for an initial attendance at a RACF, residential disability facility setting or a patient’s place of residence, on one occasion, applicable only to the first patient seen. The item must be billed in association with a COVID-19 vaccine suitability assessment service (MBS items 93624 to 93656 inclusive).

The MBS fee for the flag-fall item is \$66.75. The MBS rebate paid for the item is \$56.75.

**Note:** Due to time constraints, it has not been possible to amend the legislation that establishes 100% rebates for GP and OMP services. The rebate for the flag-fall items is therefore paid at 85% of the item fee. The fee amount has been increased so that the Medicare rebate paid for the flag-fall is at the same level as the equivalent rebate for the GP RACF flag-fall (MBS item 90001).

## Who is eligible?

The flag-fall fee can be applied to the first patient seen at a RACF, residential disability facility setting or a patient’s place of residence, on each occasion that the practitioner attends the facility or residence. To be eligible for the flag-fall fee, the first patient seen must be:

- i. a resident of the RACF;
- ii. a staff member of the approved provider operating the RACF;
- iii. a patient within residential disability facility setting who is unable to attend a medical practice location due to a disability;

- iv. a person employed, hired, retained or contracted to provide care and other care related services within a residential disability facility setting; or
- v. a patient in his or her place of residence who is unable to attend a medical practice location due to a medical condition, disability, dementia or frailty.

Once the flag-fall item is billed, practitioners may bill an applicable COVID-19 vaccine suitability assessment service item for each additional Medicare-eligible patient assessed at the location attended, where clinically appropriate.

### Billing

This item is only for Medicare-eligible practitioners providing COVID-19 vaccine suitability assessment service in RACFs, residential disability facility settings or in a patient's place of residence. Medical practitioners employed by RACFs or disability support facility settings cannot claim the flag-fall item, nor can nurses and other allied health practitioners.

The flag-fall item may only be billed to Medicare in association with a COVID-19 vaccine suitability assessment service (MBS items 93624 to 93656 inclusive).

### Item restrictions

The flag-fall fee for COVID-19 vaccine suitability assessments is intended as a one-off payment to help compensate practitioners for time spent outside of consulting rooms when providing a vaccine suitability assessment. The new flag fall cannot be co-claimed with other MBS payments for intended for this purpose (e.g. existing RACF flag fall items or derived-fees items for attendances outside of consulting rooms).

However, if a medical practitioner has to return to a RACF on the same day for an unrelated purpose (that is, the attendance is not continuation of an earlier attendance during which a vaccine suitability assessment was undertaken), another flag-fall fee using MBS items 90001 or 90002 would apply for the subsequent visit. In such circumstances, practitioners should retain evidence to support their claims. It is important to note that a rest breaks would not justify billing another flag-fall item.

Where a practitioner is required to return to a patient's place of residence, where that place is not a RACF, for a reason unrelated to a vaccine suitability assessment service provided to the patient earlier on the same day, it would be appropriate to bill the subsequent attendance using one of the MBS derived-fee items available to GPs and OMPs providing services outside of consulting rooms in business hours and in the after-hours period. More information about these items is available for MBS Online at: [www.mbsonline.gov.au](http://www.mbsonline.gov.au).

The flag-fall fee is payable once per visit to any eligible patient residence, regardless of whether the practitioner sees DVA or non-DVA patients or a combination of both.

Where two or more facilities or patient residences are co-located or are adjacent to each other, a practitioner is not eligible for extra compensation for visiting the second facility or residence.

The flag-fall item cannot be billed with MBS items other than COVID-19 vaccine suitability assessment services. In addition, as bulk-billing incentives apply only to attendance items, bulk-billing incentives cannot be applied to flag-fall item 90005.

## Where can I find more information?

The full item descriptor(s) and information on other changes to the MBS can be found on the MBS Online website at [www.mbsonline.gov.au](http://www.mbsonline.gov.au). You can also subscribe to future MBS updates by visiting [MBS Online](#) and clicking 'Subscribe'.

The Department of Health provides an email service for providers seeking advice on interpretation of the MBS items and rules, the *Health Insurance Act 1973* and associated regulations. If you have a query relating exclusively to interpretation of the Schedule, you should email [askMBS@health.gov.au](mailto:askMBS@health.gov.au).

In addition, you can subscribe to '[News for Health Professionals](#)' on the Services Australia website to receive regular news highlights.

If you are seeking advice in relation to Medicare billing, claiming, payments, or obtaining a provider number, please go to the Health Professionals page on the Services Australia website or contact the Services Australia on the Provider Enquiry Line – 13 21 50.

*Please note that the information provided is a general guide only. It is ultimately the responsibility of treating practitioners to use their professional judgment to determine the most clinically appropriate services to provide, and then to ensure that any services billed to Medicare fully meet the eligibility requirements outlined in the legislation.*

*This sheet is current as of the Last updated date shown above, and does not account for MBS changes since that date.*