

NYC Health Plan/Provider COVID-19 Vaccine Outreach and Counseling Program

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) and Sample Scripts

1. Which members qualify for the program?

This program includes only Medicaid (including HARP), CHP, and Medicare Advantage (including D-SNP) EmblemHealth members residing in the 5 boroughs of New York City. These members must also appear on the PCP's dedicated list of unvaccinated individuals, as provided by the City and EmblemHealth.

2. How will these members be identified for the treating PCPs?

EmblemHealth will provide an unvaccinated list to providers listing all their New York City resident patients who are eligible for the service. The provider must confirm vaccination status at the beginning of the outreach and proceed with a complete counseling session only if the patient self-reports/confirms that they have not received any dose of the vaccine yet.

3. What is the outreach time frame for the program?

The outreach date of service must be conducted between Sept. 1 and Oct. 31, 2021 to be eligible for payment. Please be aware that claims submitted to EmblemHealth associated with this program are still subject to our claims timely filing limits. Claims must be received within 120 days post-date-of-service unless otherwise specified by the applicable participation agreement.

4. Can I bill for a complete counseling session done prior to the start date or after the conclusion date of the program?

No. You would need to perform a complete counseling session within the program window, and after you have received the unvaccinated list from the health plan, to bill for it.

5. What constitutes a complete counseling session outreach service?

An outreach service must meet the following criteria:

1. The provider and the patient have a pre-existing doctor-patient relationship.
2. The patient appears as unvaccinated on the vaccination list.
3. The practice speaks to the patient, and the conversation lasts at least three minutes to include counseling about safety, efficacy, and scheduling.
4. The patient has NOT received any dose of any COVID-19 vaccine at the time of the call.
5. The patient resides in New York City.
6. The patient is 12 years old or older. If the patient is under the age of 18, the practice may speak to the patient's parent or guardian instead of the patient, as generally authorized by law.
7. The patient is an EmblemHealth member.

PCP offices should provide advice on where to get the vaccine if they do not provide them in their own office. (see resource table below)

6. What is the minimum content that must be covered during a complete counseling session?

The provider must confirm with the patient that they remain unvaccinated (has not received any dose of the vaccine) at the time of contact, before proceeding to do a complete counseling session. The provider can then proceed to do the complete counseling session, engaging in a minimum three-minute live conversation with the unvaccinated patient where the provider or designee must:

- Make a strong recommendation for an FDA-authorized COVID-19 vaccine as soon as possible, unless medically contraindicated.
- Counsel the patient on the safety and effectiveness of the vaccine in accordance with DOHMH guidance and respond to questions they may have about it. ([see nyc.gov/vaccinetalks](https://www.nyc.gov/vaccinetalks))
- Inform the patient that the NYC Health Department is also recommending that every New Yorker aged 12 years and older gets vaccinated. ([see nyc.gov/covidvaccine](https://www.nyc.gov/covidvaccine))
 - If the patient agrees to vaccination, assist the patient in booking a vaccine appointment in the office, at home ([nyc.gov/homevaccine](https://www.nyc.gov/homevaccine)), or at a different location (e.g., at [vaccinefinder.nyc.gov](https://www.vaccinefinder.nyc.gov)).
 - If the patient does not agree to vaccination, offer information on how they can obtain a vaccine later (e.g., closest vaccine walk-in site to patient's home at [vaccinefinder.nyc.gov](https://www.vaccinefinder.nyc.gov)).

7. How can I obtain a list of my unvaccinated members?

EmblemHealth will provide you with your list proactively. Or you can reach out to EmblemHealth to obtain a list at: medicaidproduct@emblemhealth.com.

8. Can a provider counsel someone who does not appear on their plan-provided list and still obtain reimbursement?

No. Providers and their team must work from the member list provided by EmblemHealth to obtain reimbursement. Other members/people that do not appear on the provider's designated list are not eligible for this program.

9. Can I forego asking the member/patient if they are vaccinated and assume that everyone on my unvaccinated list is eligible for the program?

No. You must confirm the patient's vaccination status at the beginning of the call even if they appear as unvaccinated in the Citywide Immunization Registry (CIR) We encourage you to search the patient in the CIR for their vaccination status immediately before the call to avoid calling a recently vaccinated patient. Patients who are vaccinated are not eligible for the service. For more information on the CIR, including how you can enroll your practice, how you can look up a patient's vaccination information, or if you think you may be registered and have forgotten your facility code, visit the [NYC Health Department's CIR](#) page.

10. Can I bill for every patient I do outreach to even if they do not meet all the criteria of the complete counseling session?

No. All the components must be included for the interaction to be billable as a complete counseling session.

11. What types of providers can conduct the outreach services?

Outreach services may be made by:

1. Clinical staff, including New York State-licensed physicians (MD and DO), nurse practitioners, physician assistants, certified nurse midwives, clinical nurse specialists, registered nurses, licensed practical nurses, and pharmacists. These services will be classified as "clinical outreach."
2. Any other practice staff, provided that the call is made on behalf of the provider, using a script approved by the provider, and is ultimately under the supervision of the provider. These services will be classified as "non-clinical outreach."
3. If both clinical and non-clinical staff are involved in a contact, the contact may be considered a clinical outreach if any clinical staff member spoke to the patient for three or more minutes.

12. If my practice staff makes the initial outreach and assists with the booking of an appointment, but the patient has clinical questions and I go on the phone to solve them, can I bill for the \$25 non-clinical outreach rate plus the \$50 clinical outreach rate?

No. You can only bill for one of the two. The clinician and the non-clinician can divide up the aspects of the call covered by each of them (e.g., non-clinician makes the initial contact and helps book an appointment, while clinician responds to clinical questions); if together, they cover all elements of the complete counseling session. If the clinician spent at least three minutes counseling the patient, the \$50 rate can be billed; otherwise the \$25 rate applies. **Please note that no part of the counseling session may happen concurrent with any other billable encounter.**

13. Can a practice staff member help with documenting the complete counseling session?

Yes. Practice staff may document the complete counseling session on behalf of the provider, but it is the responsibility of the provider that the documentation is sufficient to satisfy the reimbursement.

14. What types of patient outreach are considered acceptable to qualify for this program?

Telephonic outreach or face-to-face visits unrelated to sick or wellness visits (i.e., if a member happens to be in the office for a non-visit reason) where the provider is speaking directly with their patient are the acceptable modes of communication. Outreach services do not include email, social media posts, texting, or recorded (robo) telephone calls. However, if another form of outreach leads to telephonic or face-to-face contact that otherwise would qualify as an outreach service, then the subsequent outreach service will not be disqualified.

15. Can a provider make more than one outreach to a single member on their list and qualify for two separate payments?

No. A second outreach service delivered to a patient who has already received an outreach service will be considered duplicative and not reimbursable to the provider.

16. If one of my EmblemHealth patients has received one of two COVID shots, can I receive reimbursement for counseling on receiving just the second shot?

No. This program is being instituted for persons who have received no COVID shots at all at the time of outreach; however, if the patient received one dose of vaccine and is due for the second dose, you should encourage them to receive it as soon as possible. If you find that the patient appears as unvaccinated in the CIR registry, but is reporting to be vaccinated to you, you can correct their record in the CIR when you see proof of vaccination.

17. What if I outreach to a member on my list and they inform me that they have recently been vaccinated? Can I still bill for making an attempted outreach?

No. Providers may only bill for outreach activities conducted for unvaccinated members. The reality is that members may at any time obtain vaccination even though they appear on your PCP list. PCP offices must validate vaccination status at the beginning of each call to make sure member is still unvaccinated at the time of outreach.

18. What should a provider do if a member advises that they have been vaccinated when they do not appear as vaccinated on the CIR?

Patients may have been vaccinated outside New York State, or information may have been entered incorrectly into the CIR. Some patients may choose to say they are vaccinated even if they have not actually received a COVID-19 vaccine. For this outreach effort, you should accept a patient's statement that they have been vaccinated even if the CIR does not confirm it, and not proceed to provide a billable complete counseling session. However, please attempt to verify by asking them where they were vaccinated and the dates. Ask them to bring documentation to the next visit so this information can be entered into the CIR.

19. Can I provide and bill for a complete counseling session when the patient tells me that they are vaccinated, even though they appeared as unvaccinated on the unvaccinated list?

No. The patient is not eligible for a billable complete counseling session.

20. How should members/patients who are between the ages of 12 and 17 be handled?

Unless the minor is emancipated, you should speak to the patient's parent or guardian instead of the patient, as authorized by law.

21. Can I make accommodations for people with disabilities with whom I can't have a verbal conversation?

If the patient has a disability that prevents verbal conversation and communication proceeds in another form as an accommodation, such conversation is also acceptable.

22. If a provider has a sick or wellness visit (in person or virtual) and decides to counsel about the COVID vaccine, can they bill these codes?

No. Outreach Services delivered incidental to another billable service – such as a discussion of vaccination delivered during a billable office visit – are ineligible for billing. When vaccine counseling is done during patient care without the administration of the vaccine, providers can bill preventive medicine codes 99401-99404, if applicable.

23. As a PCP, am I required to report the outreach back to EmblemHealth or the City?

EmblemHealth will track the numbers of outreach by reimbursement codes and report these to the City. The PCP's obligation is to provide the service according to the parameters noted above, note the outreach service in the member's EMR, and bill accordingly. **All activities related to the program may be subject to future audit.**

24. What documentation should I be prepared to supply if I am chosen for a record audit related to the counseling?

For each complete counseling session billed, the following information should be in the patient’s medical record:

- Name of practice staff doing the complete counseling session
- Method used to have the minimum three-minute counseling session with the patient (e.g., phone, videocall)
- Content of the counseling that shows that the conversation included information on vaccine safety and efficacy (i.e., if non-clinical counseling, attest that vaccine safety and efficacy was included in the script used, and indicate the version of script that was used (the script should be stored in the practice and be available for review); for clinical counseling, attest that the conversation included vaccine safety and efficacy)
- Content of the counseling that shows that the patient was provided with information on ways to get vaccinated, including assistance to obtain the vaccine (i.e., indicate what option for vaccination was offered to the client and if call concluded with an appointment made or a home visit form submitted)

25. Is the city providing any resources or talking points for the providers?

Yes. They may be accessed here:

Topic	URL
General information	COVID-19: Vaccine - NYC Health (or call 877-VAX-4NYC; 877-829-4692) The Truth About COVID-19 Vaccines (nyc.gov) covid-19-providers-dear-colleague-updates-04122021.pdf (nyc.gov) covid-19-vaccines-faq-palm-card.pdf (nyc.gov)
For pediatric members/patients	adolescent-vaccination-speaking-with-parents.pdf (nyc.gov) covid-19-vaccine-youth-sites-flyer.pdf (nyc.gov)
Answers to common questions	truth-about-covid-19-vaccines.pdf (nyc.gov)
Arranging a home appointment	[NYC] COVID-19 Vaccination - Homebound Residents (cityofnewyork.us)
Vaccine location search (including walk-in)	NYC COVID-19 Vaccine Finder
FAQs about COVID-19 for families and educators	Covid-19-vaccine-youth-sites-flyer.pdf (nyc.gov)
COVID-19 vaccine incentives	COVID-19 Vaccine Incentives - Coronavirus (nyc.gov)
Vaccination proof for indoor activities (Key to NY)	COVID-19: Vaccine Key to NYC - NYC Health
Vaccination help for people with disabilities	covid-19-vaccine-disability-access.pdf (nyc.gov)
Third dose for people who are immunocompromised	Covid-19-third-dose.pdf (nyc.gov)
Vaccine information for providers	COVID-19: Vaccine Information for Providers - NYC Health
Vaccine communication resources for providers	COVID-19: Vaccine Communication Resources for Providers - NYC Health

26. Is reimbursement tied to actual patient vaccination?

No. The reimbursement is related to the counseling, encouragement, sharing of information regarding obtaining the vaccination, and proper documentation. Outreach services will not be disqualified based on whether the patient ultimately does or does not receive a vaccination. You will be paid for a complete counseling session for eligible patients documented in the medical record. If in addition, the patient wants to get vaccinated, and you are their vaccinator, you may also bill for the vaccination administration fee using the regular protocol. For that patient, compensation could reach \$90 between the \$50 clinical counseling session and the \$40 administration fee paid by Medicare, Medicaid, and most commercial insurance. However, for both the complete counseling session and the vaccination administration fee to be billable, they must occur on different days (the counseling session occurring before the vaccination).

27. If telephonic/video outreach and counseling as a stand-alone service become eligible for Medicaid/Medicare reimbursement while this program is still in place, can I bill this program rather than the Medicaid or Medicare plan?

No. The pre-vaccination counseling services approved by Medicaid and Medicare should be used instead.

28. Are providers obligated to participate in this program?

Participation in this program is strictly voluntary.

29. What if I have additional questions about this program?

Please contact EmblemHealth's Customer Service department at 866-447-9717. Customer Service is available seven days a week (excluding major holidays), 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Teletypewriter (TTY) services can be reached by calling 711. Providers may also reach out to their EmblemHealth Relationship Manager.

The New York City Health Department will continue to share vaccination information as it becomes available. For updates, check the COVID-19 Vaccine Information for Providers webpage: nyc.gov/health/covidvaccineprovider.

Sample Script

The licensed clinician who was assigned the unvaccinated list by the health plan must review this script, edit as needed, and approve for utilization of their **non-clinical** team members in the performance of vaccination outreach and counseling conversations on the licensed clinician's behalf.

Voicemail Script

This message is for [patient]. My name is [name]. I'm calling from [practice name] on behalf of [provider name] to provide information about the COVID-19 vaccine. COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective, including against the new variants. You can call us back at [number] or visit nyc.gov/covidvaccine for more information about the COVID-19 vaccine.

Call script

Hello, may I speak to [patient]?

If not available: I'm calling on behalf of their doctor/PA/NP to provide some information about the COVID-19 vaccine. What's a better time to reach them?

My name is [name] and I'm calling on behalf of [provider's name] at [organization/practice name]. [provider's name] is concerned that you may not be protected against COVID-19. Have you received a COVID-19 vaccine?

If no, go to Vaccine Information.

If yes: That's great to hear. Two weeks after your last dose, you are considered fully vaccinated. If you know anyone who still needs a vaccine, they can ask their doctor for a vaccine, visit nyc.gov/covidvaccine for the latest vaccine information or call **877-VAX-4NYC**.

Vaccine Information

[Provider] wants me to share some information about the vaccine with you. With the rapid spread of the Delta variant of the virus, it has never been more important to get vaccinated. The Delta variant is more contagious, more likely to cause severe illness, more likely to reinfect someone who already had COVID-19, and more likely to infect young people.

- **COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective**, including against the new variants. Scientists used decades of research for other vaccines to develop COVID-19 vaccines. The vaccines went through large clinical studies that showed they protect people from severe COVID-19 illness, hospitalization, death, and have been given safely to millions of people in the U.S.
- **COVID-19 vaccines are free**. Insurance, Social Security number, or sharing immigration status is not required.
- You may experience some side effects. Common side effects include arm soreness, headache, body aches, tiredness, and fever. Serious side effects are very rare. The vaccines **do not** contain the virus that causes COVID-19, change your DNA, or give you COVID-19.
- **You can start easing precautions after being fully vaccinated**. Once fully vaccinated, you can do many activities without a face mask. However, we recommend you keep your mask on in all public indoor settings to protect others, including children under age 12 and people who are immunocompromised. Also, you must follow the mask requirements of any place you go, such as a business, school, or workplace, or while using public transportation. If you have been exposed to COVID-19 or are symptomatic, get tested.
- **People who are not fully vaccinated** must continue to wear a face covering and maintain physical distance whenever in public. They may also be asked to provide proof of a negative test to enter some settings or not be allowed altogether in others.

The New York City Department of Health recommends every New Yorker aged 12 years or older get the vaccine. Vaccines prevent the most serious consequences of COVID-19 infection including hospitalization and death.

[Provider] asked me to call you because [he/she] strongly recommends that you get the vaccine as soon as possible. *[If possible, personalize here with information like you have diabetes and this puts you at higher risk of complications...]* I can help you schedule an appointment.

Do you have any questions about the vaccine?

If yes, answers to many common concerns can be found in The Truth About COVID-19 Vaccines available at:
nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/covid/truth-about-covid-19-vaccines.pdf

Vaccine Scheduling

On-site appointment

[Organization] is offering vaccine appointments [provide details of locations/times/vaccines offered]. I can help you schedule an appointment now. Would that work for you?

If yes, when would you like to schedule it? What day or time works best?

*Schedule appointment and skip to **Closing**. (Please note that the Complete Counseling Session will be billable if the vaccination appointment happens at least a day after the Counseling Session is completed.)*

Home appointment

Another option is to arrange to have the vaccine done in your home. Would that work for you? I can help you register for that now.

If yes, complete form at forms.cityofnewyork.us/f/home and skip to **Closing**.

Off-site appointment

- Where would you like to receive your vaccine? I can help you schedule a convenient appointment. Do you have a preference as to which vaccine you'd like?
 - Use vaccinefinder.nyc.gov/ to offer locations and filter by vaccine if needed.

Once patient selects a location:

- When would you like to schedule it? What day or time works best?
 - *Schedule appointment for patient using the vaccine finder link and skip to **Closing**.*
- *Find walk-in location (for anyone unwilling to commit to appointment).*
 - No appointment is needed at many sites. Let me help you find a walk-in site that would be convenient for you.
 - Use "walk-ups" button at <https://vaccinefinder.nyc.gov/> to find walk-in locations. Filter by vaccine at the top if patient indicates a preference.

- *Vaccine Finder* (for anyone unwilling to commit to appointment).
- If you decide later you want to make an appointment or choose a different site, visit nyc.gov/vaccinefinder, or call **877-VAX-4NYC (877-829-4692)**. No appointment is needed at many sites. You can also register for a free in-home vaccination by [visiting nyc.gov/homevaccine](https://nyc.gov/homevaccine) or calling **877-829-4692**.
 - New Yorkers getting their first dose at City sites can get \$100, free tickets, memberships, or gifts for getting vaccinated against COVID-19. These giveaways will be available for a limited time.

Closing

Do you have any other questions I can answer at this time about how to protect yourself from COVID-19?

Thank you for your time.

