



Extension of the SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) Pathology Items

Last updated: 28 March 2022

- The Australian Government has extended the temporary Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) items 69479 and 69480, which supports pathology laboratory testing for COVID-19 via polymerase chain reaction (PCR), until 30 September 2022.
- MBS items 69479 and 69480 apply following a request from a medical or nurse practitioner that the test is necessary for the clinical management of their patient.

What are the changes?

As part of Budget 2022-23, the Australian Government announced the extension of the following temporary COVID-19 pathology items on the MBS to 30 September 2022. The MBS items remain at the same MBS fee:

- MBS item 69479, at a schedule fee of \$42.50 for COVID-19 pathology laboratory testing if:
 - the person is a private patient in a public hospital; or
 - the person receives the service from a public pathology laboratory.
- MBS item 69480, at a schedule fee of \$85.00 for COVID-19 pathology laboratory testing, if the service is not covered by item 69479 (for example, where the service is provided in a private hospital or by a private pathology laboratory).

MBS Item	100% fee	85% benefit	75% benefit
69479	\$42.50	\$36.15	\$31.90
69480	\$85.00	\$72.25	\$63.75

Why are the changes being made?

The extension of MBS items 69479 and 69480 until 30 September 2022 will guarantee the ongoing accessibility of pathology laboratory testing of SARS-CoV-2 (the virus which causes COVID-19) and adequate capacity to reliably diagnose COVID-19 in patients who present to their medical or nurse practitioner and inform their clinical management.

What does this mean for providers/referrers/other stakeholders?

The extension of the temporary COVID-19 pathology items on the MBS until 30 September 2022 will allow continued support for public and private pathology providers in providing testing for SARS-CoV-2.



A request from a medical or nurse practitioner is a requirement for MBS items 69479 and 69480. In accordance with the *Health Insurance Act 1973*, rebates must only be claimed where a patient's treating practitioner determines that the test is necessary for the clinical management of their patient.

The temporary COVID-19 pathology items are exempt from episode coning arrangements. Laboratories must be specifically accredited for SARS-CoV-2 testing and under the national pathology accreditation program requirements, laboratories are still required to participate in a relevant external Quality Assurance Program for testing methods to provide testing for SARS-CoV-2.

How will these changes affect patients?

The extension of MBS items 69479 and 69480 until 30 September 2022 will allow Medicare eligible patients to continue to access clinically appropriate COVID-19 PCR testing with no out-of-pocket cost. The requirements for patients to access these services have not changed.

Who was consulted on the changes?

The extension of the temporary COVID-19 pathology items on the MBS items has been made in line with advice from the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC). The Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia, Public Pathology Australia, and Australian Pathology are being consulted on the arrangements for COVID-19 testing on an ongoing basis.

How will the changes be monitored and reviewed?

The COVID-19 testing items are scheduled to be listed until 30 September 2022. Ongoing community transmission of COVID-19 and advice from the AHPPC will inform any further changes, including extensions, to these items.

Where can I find more information?

If you have a query relating to the interpretation of the MBS, you should email askMBS@health.gov.au. Subscribe to 'News for Health Professionals' on the Services Australia website to receive regular news highlights:

<https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/organisations/health-professionals/news/all>.

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

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