



# SARS-CoV-2 testing for asymptomatic staff of residential and in-home aged care providers in Victoria and interstate freight workers

Last updated: 29 September 2020

- Commencing 28 July 2020, a new temporary MBS item has been made available for bulk-billed pathology testing for asymptomatic staff of residential and in-home aged care service providers in Victoria.
- As of 3 August 2020, the item was expanded to apply to workers who are required to travel interstate as a driver of a heavy vehicle.
- As of 22 September 2020, the item was further expanded to apply to interstate rail crew members.
- Eligible workers may access the service on a voluntary basis by visiting an Approved Pathology Collection Centre operated by a private pathology provider. The test does not require a request from a medical practitioner.
- Symptomatic patients and staff of residential and in-home aged care service providers in states and territories other than Victoria should consult with and access services through a medical practitioner in line with relevant state or territory public health guidance.
- The new item is not to be claimed with other pathology items, including patient episode initiation fees and bulk-billing incentives. The item fee includes the value of a patient episode initiation fee equivalent to MBS item 73928 (fee of \$5.95) and bulk billing incentive equivalent to MBS item 74995 (fee of \$4.00).
- Testing services under the new item can only be provided by private sector pathology providers, must be bulk-billed, and are not available to hospital in-patients.
- The item requires reporting of test results to all appropriate authorities in accordance with the relevant state or territory legislation or regulations and patients, within 24 hours of receipt of the specimen.

## What are the changes?

From 28 July 2020, a new item (69501) is available for Medicare bulk-billed microbiology testing for the detection of severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) in asymptomatic staff of residential and in-home aged care service providers in Victoria. The MBS fee for the new item is \$110.00, with an 85% benefit of \$93.50.

From 3 August 2020, item 69501 has been expanded to apply to workers who are required to travel interstate as a driver of a heavy vehicle.

From 22 September 2020, item 69501 has been expanded to apply to interstate rail crew members.

## Why are the changes being made?



The Australian Government is bolstering Victoria's response to COVID-19 by facilitating the screening of asymptomatic workers in the aged care and home care sector by introducing a Medicare item for COVID-19 testing which does not require a request from a medical practitioner.

The introduction of this item will help ensure the safety of senior Victorians receiving aged care as well as providing protection for staff of residential and in-home aged care providers in Victoria.

Additionally, concerns have been raised about the possibility of asymptomatic interstate truck drivers and rail crew with COVID-19 moving between states and territories.

In response to these concerns, the new SARS-CoV-2 testing item 69501 has been expanded to apply to workers who are required to travel interstate as a driver of a heavy vehicle or as rail crew.

The expansion will enable the screening of asymptomatic people who are employed, hired, retained or contracted, to travel interstate as a driver of a heavy vehicle or as rail crew. This will help protect Australian residents from the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) from people who are required to drive a heavy vehicle or train to transport goods across state and territory borders.

## What does this mean for providers?

The introduction of this new item affords private sector pathology providers the ability to provide microbiology testing for SARS-CoV-2 to:

- asymptomatic workers of residential and in-home aged care service providers in Victoria; and
- asymptomatic freight workers who are required to travel interstate as a driver of a heavy vehicle or as rail crew.

This item is not to be claimed with other pathology items. A patient episode initiation (PEI) rebate or bulk billing incentive (BBI) will not be applicable with MBS item 69501. However, an MBS fee has been applied to the new MBS item 69501 so that it is equivalent to the total MBS rebate paid for MBS item 69480 when claimed with the relevant PEI and BBI for a private sector collection centre sample (MBS item 73928 and MBS item 74995). A PEI and BBI has not been applied to MBS item 69501 as the Government may assist with collecting samples, which would not attract a PEI or BBI.

Testing services under the new item can only be provided by private sector pathology providers, must be bulk-billed, and are not available to hospital in-patients.

The item requires reporting of test results to all appropriate authorities in accordance with the relevant state or territory legislation or regulations and patients, within 24 hours of receipt of the specimen.

Testing for asymptomatic workers who are required to travel interstate as a driver of a heavy vehicle can be provided nationally.

Testing for asymptomatic workers of residential and in-home aged care service providers is only available for workers who are employed, hired, retained or contracted by an aged care service provider in Victoria.



The new item is available from 28 July 2020. Providers may submit claims for the testing of asymptomatic workers of residential and in-home aged care service providers in Victoria to Services Australia from 29 July 2020.

Providers may submit claims for the testing of asymptomatic workers who are required to travel interstate as a driver of a heavy vehicle to Services Australia from 3 August 2020 and for interstate rail crew from 22 September 2020.

## How will these changes affect patients?

To access the service, eligible patients may present at an Approved Pathology Collection Centre operated by a private pathology provider for testing, and should provide evidence they are employed, hired, retained or contracted;

- I. by an approved aged care provider, or are working in an aged care service in Victoria; or
- II. to travel interstate as a driver of a heavy vehicle; or to travel interstate as a rail crew member.

Alternatively, where the Victorian or Commonwealth Government has identified an aged care facility or service where risk of infection is high, a specimen collection team may be dispatched to offer testing to all workers of that facility or service.

Eligible patients will not be required to have a request from a medical practitioner to access the service and all testing is on a voluntary basis.

Symptomatic patients and staff of residential and in-home aged care service providers in states and territories other than Victoria should consult with and access services through a medical practitioner in line with relevant state or territory public health guidance.

## Who was consulted on the changes?

Due to the rapidly changing nature of the pandemic, it was not reasonably possible to undertake normal consultations with stakeholders prior to the introduction of the MBS item.

## How will the changes be monitored and reviewed?

Item 69501 is scheduled to be listed until 31 March 2021. Disease progression in the community and advice from the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee will determine whether the item is required for a longer time.

## Where can I find more information?

If you have a query relating to interpretation of the MBS Schedule, you should email [askMBS@health.gov.au](mailto:askMBS@health.gov.au).

Subscribe to '[News for Health Professionals](#)' on the Services Australia website and you will receive regular news highlights.

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

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