



# SARS-CoV-2 testing for asymptomatic aged care workers and interstate freight workers

Last updated: 14 July 2021

- The Australian Government has extended the temporary COVID-19 pathology items listed on the Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) to 31 December 2021.
- MBS item 69501 may be claimed for COVID-19 pathology services provided for a person employed, hired, retained or contracted:
  - by an aged care service in Victoria
  - to travel interstate as a driver of a heavy vehicle
  - to travel interstate as a rail crew member
- Eligible patients may access the service on a voluntary basis by visiting an Approved Pathology Collection Centre operated by a private pathology provider. A referral from a Medical Practitioner is not required.
- As the item is intended to support asymptomatic testing, eligible patients who are symptomatic or meet epidemiological criteria should consult with and access services through a medical practitioner in line with relevant state or territory public health guidance.
- 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.
- A patient episode initiation (PEI) rebate or bulk billing incentive (BBI) is not applicable with item 69501. However, an MBS fee has been applied to item 69501 so that it is equivalent to the total MBS rebate paid for item 69480 when claimed with the relevant PEI and BBI for a private collection centre sample (items 73928 and 74995).

## What are the changes?

On 14 March 2021, the Australian Government announced the extension of the temporary COVID-19 pathology items on the MBS to 31 December 2021 including MBS item 69501.

MBS item 69501 was made available from 28 July 2020 for 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 item was later expanded to include interstate freight workers.

## Why are the changes being made?

The introduction of item 69501 has helped ensure the safety of senior Australians receiving aged care, and staff of residential and in-home aged care providers in Victoria. The item has also reduced the risk of asymptomatic interstate freight workers transmitting COVID-19 between states and territories, protecting Australians nationwide. The decision to extend this temporary item and other COVID-19 measures until 31 December 2021 has been made in order to ensure the continued health and safety of Australians.



## What does this mean for providers?

The extension of MBS item 69501 until 31 December 2021 will allow continued support for private pathology providers in providing testing for SARS-CoV-2 to eligible patients. The billing requirements for this item have not changed.

This item is not available to hospital in-patients, and is not to be claimed with other pathology items.

A patient episode initiation (PEI) rebate or bulk billing incentive (BBI) is not applicable with item 69501. A PEI and BBI has not been applied to item 69501 as the Government may assist with collecting samples. However, an MBS fee has been applied to MBS item 69501 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 items 73928 and 74995).

Services under MBS item 69501 must only be provided by private pathology providers, and must be bulk-billed. 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.

## How will these changes affect patients?

The extension of item 69501 will allow eligible patients to continue accessing this service until 31 December 2021.

Eligible patients may present at an Approved Pathology Collection Centre operated by a private pathology provider, and 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 rail crew member.

Alternatively, where the 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.

## Who was consulted on the changes?

The extension of MBS item 69501 has been conducted in line with advice from the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC).

## How will the changes be monitored and reviewed?

MBS item 69501 will be listed until 31 December 2021. Disease progression in the community and advice from the AHPPC will inform whether the item is required beyond this date.

## Where can I find more information?

If you have a query relating to interpretation of the MBS, you should email [askMBS@health.gov.au](mailto: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, and does not account for MBS changes since that date.*