



Claiming Microbiology Tests for SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19)

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 items 69479 and 69480 may be claimed for COVID-19 pathology tests provided to Medicare eligible patients from 1 April 2020 to 31 December 2021.
- COVID-19 pathology tests provided under MBS item 69485 between 13 March 2020 and 31 March 2020 can be supplemented with an additional MBS rebate payable under supplementary MBS items 69476 and 69477.
- Claims for items 69476, 69477, 69479, 69480, 69485 must be directly billed to Medicare and cannot incur any additional cost over the MBS rebate (i.e. the services must be bulk-billed).
- A request from a Medical Practitioner is a requirement for MBS items 69479, 69480 and 69485; rebates can only be claimed where a Medical Practitioner determines that the test is medically necessary for the treatment of the patient.

What are the changes?

On 14 March 2021, the Australian Government announced the extension of the following temporary COVID-19 pathology items on the MBS to 31 December 2021:

- MBS item 69485, for all COVID-19 pathology services provided from 13 March 2020 to 31 March 2020
- MBS item 69479, for COVID-19 pathology services provided from 1 April 2020 to 31 December 2021, if:
 - the person is a private patient in a recognised hospital; or
 - the person receives the service from a prescribed laboratory as described in 4.1 of the Pathology Services Table
- MBS item 69480, for COVID-19 pathology services provided from 1 April 2020 to 31 December 2021 where the service is not covered by item 69479 (i.e. where the service is provided out-of-hospital or in a private hospital, and by a private pathology laboratory)
- MBS item 69476, providing a supplementary rebate for COVID-19 pathology services provided from 13 to 31 March 2020 under item 69485, to provide a combined rebate equivalent to MBS item 69479, if:
 - the person is a private patient in a recognised hospital; or
 - the person receives the service from a prescribed laboratory as described in 4.1 of the Pathology Services Table
- MBS Item 69477, providing a supplementary rebate for COVID-19 pathology services provided from 13 to 31 March 2020 under item 69485, to provide a combined rebate equivalent to MBS item 69480, if the service is not covered by item 69479 (i.e. where the service is provided out-of-hospital or in a private hospital, and by a private pathology laboratory)



Why are the changes being made?

The extension of these temporary COVID-19 pathology items on the MBS until 31 December 2021 has been made to ensure the continued health and safety of Australians. The availability of these items helps ensure there is adequate capacity to provide accessible and rapid laboratory testing of SARS-CoV-2, the virus which causes the disease known commonly as COVID-19.

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

The extension of the temporary COVID-19 pathology items on the MBS until 31 December 2021 will allow continued support for public and private pathology providers in providing testing for SARS-CoV-2.

The billing requirements for these items have not changed. The items must be directly billed to Medicare and cannot incur any additional cost over the MBS rebate (i.e. the services must be bulk-billed).

A request from a Medical Practitioner is a requirement for MBS items 69479, 69480 and 69485; rebates can only be claimed where a Medical Practitioner determines that the test is medically necessary for the treatment of the patient.

The temporary COVID-19 pathology items are exempt from episode coning arrangements. Non-Public Health Laboratory Network (PHLN) laboratories are still required to participate in a relevant external Quality Assurance Program for testing methods to provide testing for SARS-CoV-2 under item 69480.

How will these changes affect patients?

The extension of the temporary COVID-19 pathology items on the MBS until 31 December 2021 will allow Medicare eligible patients with a referral from Medical practitioner to continue to access COVID-19 testing at 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).

How will the changes be monitored and reviewed?

The COVID-19 testing and supplementary items are scheduled to be listed until 31 December 2021. Disease progression in the community and advice from the AHPPC will inform whether they are required beyond this time.

Where can I find more information?

If you have a query relating to 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.