



New temporary pathology items for SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) and other respiratory pathogens

Last updated: 9 September 2022

- From 1 October 2022, ten new temporary Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) pathology items will be introduced for pathology laboratory testing for SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19) and other respiratory pathogens.
- The new temporary MBS items:
 - apply where a medical or nurse practitioner determines the test is necessary for the clinical management of their patient;
 - supersede MBS items 69479 and 69480 which cease on 30 September 2022; and
 - will cease on 31 December 2022, with future arrangements to be informed by ongoing community transmission of COVID-19 and the advice of public health officials and the pathology sector.
- The introduction of the new temporary MBS items supports pathology providers to use multiplex tests to diagnose and differentiate the cause of respiratory infections through a single sample and test, where clinically appropriate, and supports MBS claiming for such tests through single MBS items.
- Existing generic nucleic acid amplification test (NAAT) MBS items 69494, 69495 and 69496 will remain in place to support testing for non-respiratory pathogens and testing of respiratory pathogens where a treating practitioner has not requested their patient be tested for COVID-19.

What are the changes?

From 1 October to 31 December 2022, a new temporary MBS item structure consisting of ten new items will apply for testing for COVID-19 and other respiratory pathogens.

The new items are:

- MBS item 69506, which supports standalone COVID-19 testing if:
 - the person is a private patient in a public hospital and the fee charged does not exceed the schedule fee; or
 - the person receives a bulk-billed service from a public pathology provider.

- MBS item 69511, which supports standalone COVID-19 testing if:
 - the person is a private patient in a private hospital and the fee charged does not exceed the schedule fee; or
 - the person receives a bulk-billed service not covered by item 69506 (i.e., the bulk-billed service is from a private pathology provider).
- MBS items 69507, 69508, 69509 and 69510, which support testing for COVID-19 and an additional 1 – 3, 4 – 7, 8 – 11 and 12 or more respiratory pathogens respectively, if:
 - the person is a private patient in a public hospital and the fee charged does not exceed the schedule fee; or
 - the person receives a bulk-billed service from a public pathology provider.
- MBS items 69512, 69513, 69514, and 69515, which support testing for COVID-19 and an additional 1 – 3, 4 – 7, 8 – 11 and 12 or more respiratory pathogens respectively, if:
 - the person is a private patient in a private hospital and the fee charged does not exceed the schedule fee; or
 - the person receives a bulk-billed service not covered by item 69507, 69508, 69509 or 69510 (i.e., the bulk-billed service is from a private pathology provider).

Attachment A contains additional information concerning the new items.

The new temporary MBS items supersede temporary MBS items 69479 and 69480, which apply for COVID-19 tests provided from 1 April 2020 to 30 September 2022.

The existing generic NAAT MBS items 69494, 69495 and 69496 will remain in place to support testing for non-respiratory pathogens and testing of respiratory pathogens where the treating practitioner has not also requested their patient be tested for COVID-19 (for example, where a patient presents to an Approved Collection Centre with a request for influenza A and influenza B testing only).

Why are the changes being made?

In the October Budget 2022-23, the Australian Government has agreed to the introduction of a new, temporary MBS item structure to support testing for COVID-19 and other respiratory pathogens, to apply from 1 October to 31 December 2022.

The introduction of new temporary MBS items for COVID-19 testing until 31 December 2022 supports ongoing accessibility of pathology laboratory COVID-19 testing for Medicare-eligible patients who have received a valid request from a medical or nurse practitioner. This is particularly important in ensuring older Australians and those with certain underlying medical conditions can be accurately diagnosed with COVID-19 infection and be provided with immediate access to antiviral treatment where appropriate.

Additionally, the new items support testing for an increased number of respiratory pathogens compared to the existing generic NAAT MBS items, where requested by a treating practitioner alongside COVID-19, which better reflects modern clinical practice.

It recognises that the size of respiratory pathogen panels and complexity of testing has increased significantly since the initial listing of generic NAAT MBS items in November 2005 and will support the Department to consider and provide advice to Government on longer-term options to reform the existing generic NAAT MBS items.

While the new temporary items do not specify a methodology, and the decision of the most appropriate testing approach is left to the discretion of providers, the items will provide appropriate rebates where providers use multiplex tests and support simplified MBS claiming for such services.

The changes have been communicated and will come into effect before the October Budget 2022-23, in recognition of the cessation of the temporary MBS items for COVID-19 testing (69479 and 69480) from 1 October 2022.

What does this mean for requesters?

In line with the temporary MBS items 69479 and 69480 and other MBS pathology services, Medicare rebates may only be claimed for the new temporary items where a medical or nurse practitioner determines the test is necessary for the clinical management of their patient and provides a valid request.

Where a treating practitioner considers a test for COVID-19 to be necessary for the clinical management of their patient, it should be explicitly stated in the request, including where testing for COVID-19 is requested alongside testing for other respiratory pathogens.

What does this mean for providers?

The new temporary MBS items will allow continued support for pathology providers testing for COVID-19 and temporarily change the way providers claim rebates for testing for COVID-19 and other respiratory pathogens.

Under the previous temporary arrangements that apply to pathology laboratory tests conducted from 1 April 2020 to 30 September 2022, pathologists may claim:

- MBS item 69479 or 69480 **only**, where a treating practitioner has requested that their Medicare-eligible patient receives a test for COVID-19 only; or
- MBS item 69479 or 69480 **and** 69494, 69495 or 69496, where a treating practitioner has requested that their Medicare-eligible patient receives a test for COVID-19 and other respiratory pathogen(s); or
- 69494, 69495 or 69496 **only**, where a treating practitioner has requested that their Medicare-eligible patient receives a test for respiratory pathogen(s) but has not specified a test for COVID-19.

Under the new temporary arrangements that apply to pathology laboratory tests conducted from 1 October 2022 to 31 December 2022, pathologists may claim:

- MBS item 69506 or 69511 **only**, where a treating practitioner has requested that their Medicare-eligible patient receives a test for COVID-19 only; or

- MBS item 69507, 69508, 69509, 69510, 69512, 69513, 69514 or 69515 **only**, where a treating practitioner has requested that their Medicare-eligible patient receives a test for COVID-19 and other respiratory pathogen(s); or
- MBS item 69494, 69495 or 69496 **only**, where a treating practitioner has requested that their Medicare-eligible patient receives a test for respiratory pathogen(s) but has not specified a test for COVID-19.

Where a pathology provider considers there is any ambiguity concerning what test(s) the treating provider has requested, the pathology provider should discuss and clarify the request with the treating practitioner.

While the new temporary items 69507, 69508, 69509, 69510, 69512, 69513, 69514 and 69515 do not specify a methodology, and providers are encouraged to determine the most appropriate approach on a case-by-case basis, they will support and provide appropriate rebates where providers use multiplex tests (noting the appropriate item to claim is dependent on the service(s) requested by the treating practitioner, not the range of tests provided for by a multiplex assay used by the laboratory).

Additionally, in contrast to the existing arrangements which require providers to submit claims for multiple MBS items, in most cases these new items will support simplified claiming under a single item for an equivalent range of tests.

In line with temporary MBS items 69479 and 69480, the new temporary items must be bulk-billed in out-of-hospital settings, fees charged to privately insured patients in in-hospital settings must not exceed the schedule fee of the relevant item being claimed, and the items are exempt from episode coning arrangements. These requirements ensure there are no direct costs to eligible patients for COVID-19 testing claimed under Medicare.

Laboratories must be specifically accredited for SARS-CoV-2 testing and, under the national pathology accreditation program requirements, are required to participate in a relevant external Quality Assurance Program for testing methods to provide testing for SARS-CoV-2.

MBS items 69494, 69495 or 69496 will remain on the schedule to support tests for non-respiratory pathogens. Where a treating practitioner has requested that their Medicare-eligible patient receive a test for COVID-19 and/or other respiratory pathogen(s) **and a non-respiratory** pathogen, providers may co-claim the relevant new temporary item (MBS items 69506, 69507, 69508, 69509, 69510, 69511, 69512, 69513, 69514 or 69515) **and** an existing permanent item (MBS items 69494, 69495 or 69496).

How will these changes affect patients?

The introduction of the new temporary MBS items will ensure Medicare-eligible patients have continued access to bulk-billed pathology laboratory-based testing for COVID-19 from 1 October to 31 December 2022.

In order to access testing under the new temporary MBS items with no out of pocket cost, patients must be enrolled in Medicare and must have a valid request for testing from a medical or nurse practitioner. This aligns with the requirements of MBS items 69479 and 69480 and other MBS pathology services.

Who was consulted on the changes?

The introduction of the new temporary MBS items was informed by consultation with Australian Pathology, Public Pathology Australia and the Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia (RCPA).

How will the changes be monitored and reviewed?

The new temporary MBS items are scheduled to be listed until 31 December 2022.

The Department is consulting the pathology sector on longer-term MBS arrangements for COVID-19 testing on an ongoing basis. Ongoing community transmission of COVID-19 and advice from public health officials and the pathology sector will inform any further changes concerning MBS arrangements for COVID-19 testing.

Where can I find more information?

The current item descriptors and information on other changes to the MBS can be found on the MBS Online website at www.mbsonline.gov.au. You can also subscribe to future updates by visiting [MBS Online](#) and clicking 'Subscribe'.

The Department of Health and Aged Care provides an email advice service for providers seeking advice on interpretation of the MBS items and rules and the *Health Insurance Act 1973* and associated regulations. If you have a query relating exclusively to interpretation of the Schedule, or to these items after they come into effect on 1 October 2022, please email askMBS@health.gov.au.

If you have questions relating to the implementation or interpretation of the changes to the new temporary pathology items for SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) and other respiratory pathogens prior to 1 October 2022, please email covidpathology@health.gov.au.

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

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

The data file for software vendors will be available via the MBS Online website under the [Downloads](#) page.

Please note that the information provided is a general guide only. It is ultimately the responsibility of treating practitioners to use their professional judgment to determine the most clinically appropriate services to provide, and then to ensure that any services billed to Medicare fully meet the eligibility requirements outlined in the legislation.

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

Attachment A: item descriptor details

New items for public providers

New item 69506 – COVID-19 test, public providers

Overview: MBS item 69506 is available for pathology laboratory testing for COVID-19 requested by a medical or nurse practitioner for a private patient in a public hospital or provided by a public pathology provider, regardless of the patient's setting.

Descriptor: Detection of SARS-CoV-2 nucleic acid if:

- a. the person is a private patient in a recognised hospital and the fee charged for the service does not exceed the schedule fee; or
- b. the person receives a bulk-billed service from a prescribed laboratory

MBS Fee: \$34.90

Benefit: 75% = \$26.20 85% = \$29.70

New item 69507 – Test for COVID-19 and respiratory pathogens, public providers

Overview: MBS item 69507 is available for 2 to 4 pathology laboratory tests for respiratory pathogens (including a COVID-19 test) requested by a medical or nurse practitioner for a private patient in a public hospital or provided by a public pathology provider, regardless of the patient's setting.

Descriptor: Detection of a viral, fungal, atypical pneumonia pathogen or Bordetella species nucleic acid from a nasal swab, throat swab, nasopharyngeal aspirate and/or lower respiratory tract sample, including a service described in 69506, if:

- a. the person is a private patient in a recognised hospital and the fee charged for the service does not exceed the schedule fee; or
- b. the person receives a bulk-billed service from a prescribed laboratory

2 to 4 tests

MBS fee: \$37.85

Benefit: 75% = \$28.40 85% = \$32.20

New item 69508 – Test for COVID-19 and respiratory pathogens, public providers

Overview: MBS item 69508 is available for 5 to 8 pathology laboratory tests for respiratory pathogens (including a COVID-19 test) requested by a medical or nurse practitioner for a private patient in a public hospital or provided by a public pathology provider, regardless of the patient's setting.

Descriptor: 5 to 8 tests described in 69507.

Fee: \$40.85

Benefit: 75% = \$30.65 85% = \$34.75

New item 69509 – Test for COVID-19 and respiratory pathogens, public providers

Overview: MBS item 69509 is available for 9 to 12 pathology laboratory tests for respiratory pathogens (including a COVID-19 test) requested by a medical or nurse practitioner for a private patient in a public hospital or provided by a public pathology provider, regardless of the patient's setting.

Descriptor: 9 to 12 tests described in 69507.

Fee: \$43.80

Benefit: 75% = \$32.85 85% = \$37.25

New item 69510 – Test for COVID-19 and respiratory pathogens, public providers

Overview: MBS item 69510 is available for 13 or more pathology laboratory tests for respiratory pathogens (including a COVID-19 test) requested by a medical or nurse practitioner for a private patient in a public hospital or provided by a public pathology provider, regardless of the patient's setting.

Descriptor: 13 or more tests described in 69507.

Fee: \$46.75

Benefit: 75% = \$35.10 85% = \$39.75

New items for private providers

New item 69511 – COVID-19 test, private providers

Overview: MBS item 69511 is available for pathology laboratory testing for COVID-19 requested by a medical or nurse practitioner if the service is not covered by item 69506 (for example, where the service is provided in a private hospital or by a private pathology provider).

Descriptor: Detection of SARS-CoV-2 nucleic acid if:

- a. the person is a private patient in a hospital other than a recognised hospital and the fee charged for the service does not exceed the schedule fee; or
- b. the person receives a bulk-billed service not covered by item 69506

Fee: \$68.85

Benefit: 75% = \$51.65 85% = \$58.55

New item 69512 – Test for COVID-19 and respiratory pathogens, private providers

Overview: MBS item 69512 is available to support 2 to 4 pathology laboratory tests for respiratory pathogens (including a COVID-19 test) requested by a medical or nurse practitioner if the service is not covered by item 69507 (for example, where the service is provided in a private hospital or by a private pathology provider).

Descriptor: Detection of a viral, fungal, atypical pneumonia pathogen or Bordetella spp. nucleic acid from a nasal swab, throat swab, nasopharyngeal aspirate and/or lower respiratory tract sample, and a service described in 69511, if:

- a. the person is a private patient in a hospital other than a recognised hospital and the fee charged for the service does not exceed the schedule fee; or
- b. the person receives a bulk-billed service not covered by item 69507

2 to 4 tests

Fee: \$74.75

Benefit: 75% = \$56.10 85% = \$63.55

New item 69513 – Test for COVID-19 and respiratory pathogens, private providers

Overview: MBS item 69513 is available to support 5 to 8 pathology laboratory tests for respiratory pathogens (including a COVID-19 test) requested by a medical or nurse practitioner if the service is not covered by item 69508 (for example, where the service is provided in a private hospital or by a private pathology provider).

Descriptor: 5 to 8 tests described in 69512

Fee: \$80.65

Benefit: 75% = \$60.50 85% = \$68.60

New item 69514 – Test for COVID-19 and respiratory pathogens, private providers

Overview: MBS item 69514 is available to support 9 to 12 pathology laboratory tests for respiratory pathogens (including a COVID-19 test) requested by a medical or nurse practitioner if the service is not covered by item 69509 (for example, where the service is provided in a private hospital or by a private pathology provider).

Descriptor: 9 to 12 tests described in 69512

Fee: \$86.55

Benefit: 75% = \$64.95 85% = \$73.60

New item 69515 – Test for COVID-19 and respiratory pathogens, private providers

Overview: MBS item 69515 is available to support 13 or more pathology laboratory tests for respiratory pathogens (including a COVID-19 test) requested by a medical or nurse practitioner if the service is not covered by item 69510 (for example, where the service is provided in a private hospital or by a private pathology provider).

Descriptor: 13 or more tests described in 69512

Fee: \$92.45

Benefit: 75% = \$69.35 85% = \$78.60