



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

Last updated: 12 December 2022

- The Australian Government has extended the existing temporary Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) pathology items for pathology laboratory testing for SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19) and other respiratory pathogens from 1 January 2023 until 31 December 2023.
- During 2023, the Government will seek the advice of the Medical Services Advisory Committee (MSAC) on permanent MBS arrangements for COVID-19 testing.
- The extension of the 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 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.
- The restriction on the current MBS items that in-hospital patients cannot be charged more than the MBS fee will be removed in line with other MBS pathology items.
- All other existing requirements of the current MBS items will remain in place, including that out-of-hospital patients must be bulk-billed, and that these services apply where a medical or nurse practitioner determines the test is necessary for the clinical management of their patient.

What are the changes?

The current temporary MBS items for standalone COVID-19 testing (69506 and 69512) and for testing for COVID-19 and additional respiratory pathogens (69508, 69509, 69510, 69513, 69514, and 69515) have been extended to 31 December 2023.

The only change to the existing temporary MBS items will be the removal of the requirement that in-hospital private patients cannot be charged more than the MBS fee. The removal of this requirement aligns with other MBS listed pathology services.

All other existing requirements of the current MBS items will remain in place, including that out-of-hospital patients must be bulk-billed, and that these services apply where a medical or

nurse practitioner determines the test is necessary for the clinical management of their patient.

Attachment A contains additional information concerning the extended temporary items.

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).

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 (e.g., “Respiratory virus PCR including COVID-19”).

What does this mean for providers?

The extension of the temporary MBS items will allow continued support for pathology providers testing for COVID-19 and testing for COVID-19 and other respiratory pathogens.

Under the current temporary arrangements that have been extended to apply to pathology laboratory tests conducted from 1 October 2022 to 31 December 2023, 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 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).

The temporary MBS items continue to be exempt from episode coning arrangements. 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 extension of the temporary MBS items will ensure Medicare-eligible patients have continued access to bulk-billed pathology laboratory-based testing for COVID-19 to 31 December 2023.

What does this mean for private health insurers?

Private health insurance minimum benefit classifications for these items remain unchanged.

- Clinical category: Support list (pathology)
- Procedure type: Type C

Who was consulted on the changes?

The introduction of the 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 temporary MBS items are scheduled to be listed until 31 December 2023.

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, the pathology sector and MSAC 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, you should email askMBS@health.gov.au.

Private health insurance information on the product tier arrangements is available at www.privatehealth.gov.au. Detailed information on the MBS item listing within clinical categories is available on the [Department's website](#). Private health insurance minimum accommodation benefits information, including MBS item accommodation classification, is available in the latest version of the *Private Health Insurance (Benefit Requirements) Rules 2011* found on the [Federal Register of Legislation](#). If you have a query in relation to private health insurance, you should email PHI@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 factsheet is current as of the Last updated date shown above and does not account for MBS changes since that date.

Attachment A: Item descriptors (effective 1 January 2023)

Items for public providers

| Category 6 – Pathology Services | |
|---|--|
| Group P3 - Microbiology | |
| 69506 | |
| Detection of SARS-CoV-2 nucleic acid if: | |
| a. the person is a private patient in a recognised hospital; or | |
| b. the person receives a bulk-billed service from a prescribed laboratory | |
| MBS Fee: \$34.90 | |
| Benefit: 75% = \$26.20 85% = \$29.70 | |
| 69507 | |
| 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; 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 | |
| 69508 | |
| 5 to 8 tests described in 69507. | |
| MBS Fee: \$40.85 | |
| Benefit: 75% = \$30.65 85% = \$34.75 | |
| 69509 | |
| 9 to 12 tests described in 69507. | |
| MBS Fee: \$43.80 | |
| Benefit: 75% = \$32.85 85% = \$37.25 | |

Category 6 – Pathology Services

69510

13 or more tests described in 69507.

MBS Fee: \$46.75

Benefit: 75% = \$35.10

85% = \$39.75

Items for private providers

Category 6 – Pathology Services

Group P3 - Microbiology

69511

Detection of SARS-CoV-2 nucleic acid if:

- a. the person is a private patient in a hospital other than a recognised hospital; or
- b. the person receives a bulk-billed service not covered by item 69506

MBS Fee: \$68.85

Benefit: 75% = \$51.65

85% = \$58.55

69512

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, and a service described in 69511, if:

- a. the person is a private patient in a hospital other than a recognised hospital; or
- b. the person receives a bulk-billed service not covered by item 69507

2 to 4 tests

MBS Fee: \$74.75

Benefit: 75% = \$56.10

85% = \$63.55

69513

5 to 8 tests described in 69512.

MBS Fee: \$80.65

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

Category 6 – Pathology Services

69514

9 to 12 tests described in 69512.

MBS Fee: \$86.55

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

69515

13 or more tests described in 69512.

MBS Fee: \$92.45

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