

DHCS Frequently Asked Questions

1. Which COVID-19 tests are covered benefits?

Medi-Cal covers all FDA approved COVID-19 tests.

2. Which Medi-Cal beneficiaries are eligible for a COVID-19 test?

All enrolled Medi-Cal beneficiaries are eligible for a COVID-19 test, when determined medically necessary. Additionally for all enrolled Medi-Cal individuals, regardless of their scope of coverage, DHCS has deemed COVID-19 testing, testing-related and related medically necessary treatment services, including services rendered outside of hospital emergency department, as an emergency service to treat an emergency medical condition.

3. When is a COVID-19 test medically necessary?

Providers should follow the CDPH COVID-19 [Updated COVID-19 Testing Guidance](#) for public health officials, healthcare providers, and laboratories to determine when a test is necessary.

Under Medi-Cal, medical necessity is defined in Section 14059.5 of the Welfare and Institutions Code as follows:

- For individuals 21 years of age or older, a service is “medically necessary” or a “medical necessity” when it is reasonable and necessary to protect life, to prevent significant illness or significant disability, or to alleviate severe pain.
- For individuals under 21 years of age, consistent with state and federal laws and regulations for the Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic, and Treatment benefit, medically necessary services, include those to “correct or ameliorate” defects and physical and mental illnesses or conditions.

4. What are the billable procedure codes for COVID-19 tests?

Procedure Code	Test
CPT 86328	Immunoassay for infectious agent antibody(ies), qualitative or semiquantitative, single step method [e.g., reagent strip]
CPT 86769	Antibody; Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome 2 [SARS-CoV-2] Coronavirus disease [COVID-19]
CPT 87635	Infectious agent detection by nucleic acid [DNA or RNA]
CPT 86408 – effective 8/10/2020	Neutralizing antibody, severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) (Coronavirus disease [COVID19]); screen

CPT 86409 – effective 8/10/2020	Neutralizing antibody, severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) (Coronavirus disease [COVID19]); titer
CPT 86413 – effective 9/8/2020	Severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) (Coronavirus disease [COVID-19]) antibody, quantitative
CPT 87426	Infectious agent antigen detection by immunoassay technique, (e.g., enzyme immunoassay [EIA], enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay [ELISA], immunochemiluminometric assay [IMCA] qualitative or semiquantitative, multiple-step method; [SARS-CoV, SARS-CoV-2])
CPT 87811 – effective 10/7/2020	Infectious agent antigen detection by immunoassay with direct optical (i.e., visual) observation; severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) (Coronavirus disease [COVID-19])
CPT 87636 – effective 10/7/2020	Infectious agent detection by nucleic acid (DNA or RNA); severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) (Coronavirus disease [COVID-19]) and influenza virus types A and B, multiplex amplified probe technique
CPT 87637– effective 10/7/2020	Infectious agent detection by nucleic acid (DNA or RNA); severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) (Coronavirus disease [COVID-19]), influenza virus types A and B, and respiratory syncytial virus, multiplex amplified probe technique
HCPCS U0001	CDC [SARS-CoV-2] Real-Time RT-PCR Diagnostic Panel
HCPCS U0002	Non-CDC laboratory tests for [SARS-CoV-2].
HCPCS U0003 and U0004	SARS-CoV-2 for the diagnosis of the virus that causes COVID-19 making use of high-throughput technologies.
HCPCS G2023 and G2024	Specimen collection for COVID-19 testing. Billable by clinical diagnostic laboratories.
HCPCS C9803	Hospital outpatient clinic visit specimen collection for [SARS-CoV-2] [COVID-19]. Used specifically for hospital outpatient departments to be reimbursed for specimen collection and symptom assessment for COVID-19 testing.

For the latest list of procedure codes, visit the *Pathology Microbiology Provider Manual* [website](#).

5. What ICD-10 code should I include on a claim for a confirmed COVID-19 diagnosis?

ICD-10-CM U07.1 must be included on confirmed diagnosis claims.

6. What is the frequency limit on COVID-19 tests?

Medi-Cal policies for most tests have a frequency limit of two per day, per patient for each code. CPT codes 86408 and 86409 have a frequency limit of one per day, per patient for each code. These two new tests are specifically for neutralizing antibody tests and therefore only require one test.

7. Can a practitioner receive payment for specimen collection?

Providers can be reimbursed for assessment and specimen collection for COVID-19 testing for a new or established patient using CPT 99211, or if the swab collection occurred in the physician’s office, physicians can bill Medi-Cal with Evaluation and Management (E & M) CPT code 99000 for handling and/or conveyance of specimen for transfer from office to a laboratory.

8. Does Medi-Cal reimburse for COVID-19 testing for surveillance or employment purposes?

COVID-19 testing is a covered Medi-Cal benefit and can be provided to enrolled beneficiaries, based on medical necessity, as ordered and provided by or under the direction of a physician or other licensed practitioner of the healing arts within their scope of practice as defined by state law or ordered by a physician but provided by a referral laboratory. Tests for the detection of SARS-CoV-2 or the diagnosis of COVID-19 are mandatory Medicaid laboratory services as described in the federal Social Security Act, Section 1905(a)(3) and the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), 42 CFR 440.30.

9. Does Medi-Cal reimburse for At-Home COVID-19 tests?

Yes, at home COVID-19 tests are covered by Medi-Cal, when the test is ordered by an attending health care provider who has determined that the test is medically appropriate for the individual based on current accepted standards of medical practice. The AMA and CMS are adding testing procedure codes to the list on an emergent basis. Providers can bill Medi-Cal for at-home test when using the appropriate HCPCS/CPT code(s), and for now, CPT 87635.

10. What are the reimbursement rates for the COVID-19 tests?

Procedure Code	Medi-Cal Fee for Service ¹ Reimbursement Rates
CPT 86328	\$45.23
CPT 86769	\$42.13
CPT 87635	\$51.31
CPT 87426	\$35.33

¹ DHCS will reimburse Medi-Cal FFS providers for COVID-19 testing based on the Medicare fee schedule. Unless otherwise agreed to between a managed care plan and the provider, DHCS encourages managed care plans to reimburse providers for COVID-19 testing at the Medicare fee schedule rates.

CPT 86408, effective August 10, 2020	\$42.13
CPT 86409, effective August 10, 2020	\$79.61
CPT 86413, effective September 8, 2020	TBD, check Medi-Cal fee schedule
CPT 87811, effective October 7, 2020	TBD, check Medi-Cal fee schedule
CPT 87636, effective October 7, 2020	TBD, check Medi-Cal fee schedule
CPT 87637, effective October 7, 2020	TBD, check Medi-Cal fee schedule
HCPCS U0001	\$35.91
HCPCS U0002	\$51.31
HCPCS U0003 and U0004	\$100.00 each
HCPCS G2023	\$23.46
HCPCS G2024	\$25.46
HCPCS C9803	\$22.99

11. Can a Home Health Agency collect the COVID-19 lab specimen?

If a patient is already receiving home health services through Medi-Cal, the home health nurse, during an otherwise covered Medi-Cal visit, could obtain the sample to send to the laboratory for COVID-19 diagnostic testing.

12. Can the Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) or Rural Health Clinic (RHC) visiting nurse collect a COVID-19 lab specimen?

If a visiting nurse has an otherwise covered RHC or FQHC visit; they can obtain a sample to send to the laboratory for COVID-19 diagnostic testing.

13. Who can order COVID-19 tests?

California law ([Business and Professions Code section 1288](#)) requires that a clinical or public health laboratory accept assignments for clinical laboratory tests only from persons licensed under the provisions of law relating to the healing arts as healthcare providers with a scope of practice that authorizes ordering clinical laboratory tests or their representatives. Pursuant to Executive Order [N-39-20](#) issued by Governor Newsom, on [August 25, 2020](#), the Department of Consumer Affairs, in collaboration with CDPH and the State Board of Pharmacy issued revised guidance to authorize pharmacies, acting within their scope of the waiver, to order, collect specimen, perform, and interpret results for authorized COVID-19 tests.

14. Does Medi-Cal cover COVID-19 counseling?

Yes, in accordance with the [CMS Provider Q & A](#), Medi-Cal providers who provide COVID-19 counseling to their patients, can bill with the applicable and existing codes to report counseling services, including E & M visits.

15. Can pharmacists be reimbursed for a COVID-19 test?

Medi-Cal will pay for COVID-19 tests performed by pharmacists as part of a laboratory enrolled in Medicare. A pharmacist may also furnish basic clinical services, such as specimen collection, when performed under contract with a doctor or practitioner, in accordance with a pharmacist's scope of practice and state law. A pharmacy that acquires a Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendment (CLIA) certificate can enroll with Medicare as a clinical diagnostic laboratory to conduct and bill for clinical diagnostic laboratory tests it is authorized to perform under its CLIA certificate. Pharmacists cannot bill Medi-Cal on a pharmacy claim as a pharmacy benefit, but must enroll in Medi-Cal as a laboratory, and bill the appropriate CPT or HCPCS code. For additional information on how to enroll in Medi-Cal as a clinical laboratory in order to provide services related to the COVID-19 emergency, please see the [Requirements and Procedures for Emergency Medi-Cal Provider Enrollment](#).

16. How do pharmacists get a CLIA certificate?

CDPH is the State agency with oversight of the CLIA program for laboratories in California. Pharmacists should review the guidance on the CDPH Laboratory Field Office [website](#) for additional information, or contact:

California Department of Public Health
Division of Laboratory Science
Laboratory Field Services
320 West 4th Street, Suite 890
Los Angeles, CA 90013-2398
(213) 620-6160 or fax (213) 620-6565
Email: LFSCLIA@cdph.ca.gov