

**MINISTRY OF HEALTH
DECISION BRIEFING NOTE**

Cliff # 1159461

PREPARED FOR: Ian Rongve, Assistant Deputy Minister, Provincial, Hospital and Laboratory Health Services - **FOR DECISION**

TITLE: Fee-for-Service Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Test

PURPOSE: To obtain approval to introduce COVID-19 Test as an insured fee-for-service (FFS) benefit in the Laboratory Services Outpatient Payment Schedule under the *Laboratory Services Act*.

BACKGROUND:

On January 27, 2020, the BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC) Public Health Laboratory confirmed the first positive test for novel coronavirus, now commonly known as Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), in British Columbia.¹ As of April 8, 2020 – five weeks after the World Health Organization declared the outbreak of COVID-19 a pandemic – 52,412 COVID-19 tests were completed, and 1,336 cases were confirmed in the province.²

COVID-19 testing is available for all patients in BC; however, as of March 16, 2020, testing recommendations changed to focus on hospitalized patients, healthcare workers, long term care facility staff and residents, or those part of a cluster or outbreak who are experiencing respiratory symptoms. Individuals without symptoms or with mild symptoms, and/or returning travellers who are isolating at home, do not require a test.

In addition to BCCDC Public Health Laboratory, diagnostic testing for COVID-19 is provided by the laboratories at BC Children's and BC Women's Hospital, Vancouver General Hospital, St. Paul's Hospital, Victoria General Hospital, and Kelowna General Hospital. As of March 22, 2020, private laboratory services provider, LifeLabs (Surrey Reference Laboratory), started performing the COVID-19 test.

With more laboratory facilities – both public and private – performing COVID-19 testing and demand for the test increasing as the province responds to the COVID-19 pandemic, the introduction of a new fee-for-service fee item has been proposed.

DISCUSSION:

Currently, the COVID-19 test, an outpatient and inpatient laboratory test, is funded through the global operating budgets of the Provincial Health Services Authority (PHSA) and the regional health authorities that operate the aforementioned hospitals (Vancouver Coastal Health Authority, Island Health Authority and Interior Health Authority). PHSA and LifeLabs have a separate agreement to supplement the existing capacity to deliver the COVID-19 test.

¹ BC Gov News. Joint Statement on the first case of 2019 novel coronavirus in B.C. (webpage): <https://news.gov.bc.ca/21460> (accessed: April 9, 2020).

² Provincial Health Services Authority. Case Counts & Press Statements (webpage): <http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/case-counts-press-statements> (accessed: April 9, 2020).

This increased capacity allows for the tests to be performed throughout the day, is assisting with addressing a backlog of tests, and thus has helped the turn-around-time for test results. For example, patients who test positive are to be contacted within 24 hours following receipt of the sample at BCCDC Public Health Laboratory, and the laboratory system is well positioned to handle a surge in activity.

Health Insurance BC, which manages the fee-for-service claims processing system, recently informed the Ministry of Health (the Ministry) of a substantial increase in the billing of fee item 90830 – Viral Isolation in the last two months. Two laboratory facilities, BC Children’s and BC Women’s Hospital and St. Paul’s Hospital, are billing fee item 90830, likely in the absence of a specific fee item for COVID-19 testing. In addition, the Ministry has received an increased number of inquiries from employees in the health authorities requesting clarification on whether fee item 90830 – Viral Isolation could be used for billing for COVID-19 testing.

PHSA’s Provincial Laboratory Medicine Services (PLMS) has advised that the cost of performing the current COVID-19 test is \$26.73 per test. Expediting the Ministry’s approval process is becoming more necessary to address the rise in FFS claims for 90830 and anticipated funding requests from laboratory services providers who perform COVID-19 testing across the province.

OPTIONS:

s.13

Option 2: Approve a new FFS item for COVID-19 testing immediately.

s.13

RECOMMENDATION:

Option 2: Approve a new FFS item for COVID-19 testing immediately.



April 14, 2020

Approved/Not Approved

Date Signed

Ian Rongve, Ph.D.
Assistant Deputy Minister,
Provincial, Hospital and Laboratory Health Services

Program ADM/Division: Ian Rongve, ADM, Provincial, Hospital and Laboratory Services

Telephone:

Program Contact (for content): Mariana Diacu, ED, Laboratory and Blood Services

Drafter: Rebecca Watt A/Director, Laboratory Services, Laboratory and Blood Services Branch

Date: March 28, 2020; updated April 9, 2020

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Ministry of
Health

RECORD OF DECISION **Under the *Laboratory Services Act***

LSA ROD#:

LSA2020-008

TITLE:

**Addition of COVID-19 test to the
Laboratory Services Outpatient Payment Schedule**

In accordance with Section 4 of the *Laboratory Services Act*, the following was approved.

Approved:

1. The Laboratory Services Outpatient Payment Schedule is amended as follows:
 - a) Add the following provisional fee item:

P90837 – novel coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19 or 2019-nCoV) test
 - b) Establish the fee at \$26.73.
2. Test volumes and cost impacts will be continuously monitored. A full review will be conducted 6 months post-implementation or sooner (if required).
3. These amendments are effective January 1, 2020.

For and on behalf of the Minister of Health,

Carolyn Bell
A/Assistant Deputy Minister
Provincial, Hospital and Laboratory Health Services
Ministry of Health

Dated this 1st day of April, 2020