



August 5, 2020

## Recommended COVID-19 and Respiratory Pathogen Testing

Dear Provider:

There continue to be developments around treating patients for the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), including approved and effective testing and respiratory pathogen panels (RPPs). Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Louisiana has been closely monitoring these tests and their effectiveness to ensure the best outcomes for our members—your patients.

Since the start of the COVID-19 crisis, the FDA has approved many tests through the Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) process. The sensitivity and/or specificity of some of these tests are not optimal; in fact, the FDA has recently rescinded the EUA for some antibody tests.

It is important that our network providers are offering members services that are both medically appropriate and cost-effective. After thorough review from our own medical directors, Blue Cross is publishing recommendations for COVID-19 testing.

### COVID-19 Diagnostic Testing:

- The gold standard is the deep nasopharyngeal or anterior nasal nucleic acid amplification tests performed in complex CLIA labs. This is the recommended test and is billed from physician offices with CPT® 87635. Labs would bill us with the codes of U0002, U0003 or U0004. We recognize that availability and turn-around time has been a major concern.
- There are two rapid antigen tests for the SARS CoV-2 virus currently approved by the FDA and on the market. The CPT code is 87426. There are significant concerns with the accuracy of these tests as sensitivities and specificities were done on very small numbers. The Quidel Sofia SARS Antigen FIA test appears to have a much better sensitivity (96.7%) than the Becton Dickinson Veritor test (84%). These tests may be used as an alternative if nucleic acid-based testing is unavailable or rapid turn-around time is medically necessary.

### COVID-19 Antibody Testing:

- There is very little medical indication for antibody testing at this time. Antibodies develop about 10 days after the infection and IgG and IgM antibodies develop at the same time making a test for IgM antibodies unnecessary. Immunity has still not been correlated with the presence of antibodies.
- If an antibody test is needed, the ELISA Antibody Test for IgG antibodies (CPT 86769) is the preferred test with excellent sensitivities and specificities.

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- We are strongly discouraging the use of rapid, reagent strip antibody tests (CPT 86328) due to few medical indications for antibody testing, substantially worse specificities and cross reactivity with common cold coronaviruses.

Respiratory Pathogen Panel (RPP) (CPT codes 87631, 87632, 87633; 0098U, 0099U, 0100U, 0115U):  
Generally, this testing is not medically necessary unless the patient has had the diagnosis of both influenza and COVID-19 ruled out and has significant undiagnosed febrile respiratory symptoms. It is not recommended by the CDC as the initial test for a febrile illness and does not specifically diagnose COVID-19. While we do cover the test through our normal claims process, we are not waiving member cost shares, as it does not contain a specific SARS CoV-2 virus target.

Respiratory Pathogen Panels that include COVID-19:

This test is essentially an RPP that also includes the specific SARS CoV-2 nucleic acid target to diagnose COVID-19. Codes include 0223U and 0202U. We are occasionally seeing these tests done instead of a dedicated COVID-19 nucleic acid test. Like the other RPP tests, the additional viral and bacterial targets generally do not add significant medical diagnostic value except in a very few circumstances. Thus, we recommend the dedicated COVID-19 nucleic acid test for diagnosing COVID-19. However, when ordered we are waiving cost share (deductible and copayment, as applicable) for these panel tests because they contain a COVID-19-specific test.

Public Health Surveillance and Work- or School-related Testing:

As a reminder, under both federal and state law, testing for public health surveillance and work-related issues such as post-offer screening, returning to work and establishing fitness for duty, are covered by financial mechanisms other than medical insurance. Thus, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Louisiana should not be billed when testing for these indications, as it is not a covered medical benefit.

**Contact Us**

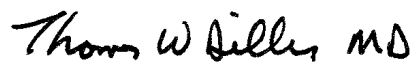
If you have any questions about billing related to COVID-19, you may send an email to our Provider Relations Department at [Provider.Relations@bcbsla.com](mailto:Provider.Relations@bcbsla.com). Please put "COVID-19 Billing" in the subject line.

Thank you for your help as we all work together to contain the spread of COVID-19 and keep our communities healthy.

Sincerely,



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