

Oral treatments for COVID-19

Prescribing workflow for GPs

This document aims to support practices to carry out patient suitability assessments for COVID-19 oral treatments in advance of a patient testing positive to COVID-19, to expedite access to these treatments in the event the patient contracts COVID-19. Prescribing these treatments forms only one part of a GP's usual holistic care of patients who test positive to COVID-19.

Two antiviral medicines, [Lagevrio \(molnupiravir\)](#) and [Paxlovid \(nirmatrelvir plus ritonavir\)](#), are now listed on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) for the treatment of COVID-19 in eligible patients.

Both medicines require a prescription from a GP, physician or nurse practitioner who meets the prescribing requirements before they can be dispensed by a pharmacy. Medicines cannot be prescribed prophylactically or prior to testing positive to COVID-19.

Both medicines must be commenced within five days of symptom onset. In people aged 70 years and above, treatment should be initiated as soon as possible after confirmation of a positive COVID-19 result, even if the patient is asymptomatic.

This document is written for prescribing of oral treatments for COVID-19 via the PBS. Access to these treatments may be available via other state and territory-based channels.

Further information on these treatments is available on the [RACGP](#) and [Department of Health](#) websites.

Pre-determining eligibility, suitability and consent

It is recommended that, where possible, GPs engage patients who may be eligible for COVID-19 oral treatments to determine their eligibility and suitability prior to contracting COVID-19. This can be done within existing Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) items for general attendances.

MBS item numbers to support eligibility and suitability assessments and prescribing

If you are consulting a patient to pre-determine their eligibility and suitability for COVID-19 oral treatments with a view to expedite prescribing and access in the event the patient tests positive, this can be achieved within a Level B consultation (<20 minutes) face-to-face, or via telehealth. In the event a patient tests positive to COVID-19 and a prescription is required, a subsequent Level B consultation could then be undertaken. If at the time of prescribing a longer consultation is required, new MBS telehealth phone items for prescribing oral treatments may be utilised.

Where pre-counselling and prescribing are completed together in a single longer consultation (>20 minutes), new telehealth phone items for prescribing oral treatments may be utilised.

MBS phone items for COVID-19 antivirals

Two MBS phone items have been introduced to support medical practitioners in treating COVID-19-positive patients. Items [93716](#) (for GPs) and [93717](#) (for other medical practitioners [OMP]) are available to assess a patient's suitability to receive a prescription for a COVID-19 oral antiviral treatment via a telehealth phone consultation lasting at least 20 minutes for GPs and 25 minutes for OMPs. The items are temporary and are available from 19 July 2022 until 31 December 2022. The items are for eligible Medicare patients nationally and can only be used when the patient has tested positive to COVID-19 and provides confirmation of their positive result.

Visit [MBS Online](#) for more information.

Exemption to the 12-month 'Existing relationship' telehealth rule for COVID-positive patients

Patients who test positive to COVID-19 on a PCR test or rapid antigen test (RAT) can access general telehealth consultations from any GP under normal MBS telehealth eligibility requirements. This means they do not need to have seen the GP providing the service or another health professional at the same practice in-person at least once in the last 12 months to access telehealth.

Eligibility criteria*

Adults who have mild to moderate COVID-19 (confirmed by a PCR test or medically verified RAT) and who can start treatment within five days of symptom onset are [eligible](#) to be prescribed oral treatments for COVID-19 if¹:

- they are 70 years of age or older**
- they are 50 years of age or older with two other risk factors for severe disease
- they identify as being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin, and are 30 years of age or older with two other risk factors for severe disease
- they are 18 years of age or older and moderately to severely immunocompromised.

*See individual PBS listing for [Lagevrio](#) and [Paxlovid](#) for further information on prescribing.

**In people 70 years of age and above, treatment should be initiated as soon as possible after confirmation of a positive COVID-19 result even if the patient is asymptomatic.

Risk factors include:

- living in residential aged care
- living with disability with multiple conditions and/or frailty (but not limited to living in supported accommodation)
- neurological conditions such as stroke or dementia and demyelinating conditions (for example, multiple sclerosis, Guillain-Barre Syndrome)
- chronic respiratory conditions including COPD, moderate or severe asthma
- obesity or diabetes (type I or II requiring medication)
- heart failure, coronary artery disease, cardiomyopathies
- kidney failure or cirrhosis
- living remotely with reduced access to higher level healthcare.

Immunocompromising conditions include:

- blood cancer or some red blood cell disorders (thalassemia, sickle cell disease)
- being a transplant recipient
- primary or acquired (HIV) immunodeficiency
- having undergone chemotherapy or whole-body radiotherapy in the last three months
- having taken high dose corticosteroids or experienced pulse corticosteroid therapy in the last three months
- having undergone immunosuppressive treatments in the last three months
- having taken rituximab in the last 12 months
- cerebral palsy or Down Syndrome
- congenital heart disease
- living with disability with multiple conditions and/or frailty.

Example prescribing workflow

Practice preparation

Consider identifying and contacting patients who may be eligible for oral treatments for COVID-19 in the event they test positive to COVID-19

For example, by running a search of the clinical information to identify patients who meet the age, risk factor or immunocompromise criteria

Implement protocols for reception staff to triage / escalate patient calls reporting a positive COVID-19 test result, including during an after-hours period. Establish a policy that outlines who and how appointments will be offered and to whom

For example, reserving appointments each day for 'on-the-day' urgent COVID-19 related telehealth consultations, and updating the practice website instructing patients who test positive to phone the practice rather than book an appointment online. Consider providing reception staff with a script to support your local policy.

Notify engaged medical deputising service/s of the pre-consent process in place in your practice, where practicable

Confirm which local pharmacies stock COVID-19 oral treatments and delivery arrangements in place for patients who are isolating. A list of pharmacies that stock these medicines can be [found here](#)

Determining suitability for oral treatments^{1,2,3}

Determine whether the patient meets the [eligibility criteria](#) (as above)

Determine the patient's pregnancy/trying-to-conceive status

NB for Lagevrio:²

- *Lagevrio is not recommended during pregnancy*
- *Breastfeeding is not recommended during treatment and for four days after the last dose*
- *People of childbearing potential should use effective contraception for the duration of treatment and for four days after the last dose of Lagevrio*
- *Men who are sexually active with a person of childbearing potential should use effective contraception during treatment and for three months after treatment with Lagevrio.*

NB for Paxlovid:³

- *Paxlovid is not recommended during pregnancy or in people of childbearing potential not using contraception*
 - *Breastfeeding is not recommended during treatment and for seven days after the last dose*
 - *People of childbearing potential should use effective contraception for the duration of treatment and for seven days after the last dose of Paxlovid*
 - *Patients using oral contraceptives (OCP) should use extra contraception as Paxlovid may affect protection.¹*
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Confirm the patient's history or risk factors for kidney function. If risk factors are present, confirm the patient's estimated Glomerular Filtration Rate (eGFR)

*NB for Paxlovid:*³

- *Paxlovid is contraindicated for patients with severe renal impairment (eGFR <30 mL/min)*
- *For patients with eGFR 30-60 mL/min² a lower dose of Paxlovid can be prescribed (i.e. one 150mg nirmatrelvir and one 100mg ritonavir taken every 12 hours for five days). Patients receiving an adjusted dose must be made aware that, as the tablets are dispensed in pre-dosed blistered cards, only one tablet of nirmatrelvir with the tablet of ritonavir should be taken every 12 hours. This means one 150mg nirmatrelvir will be left in the blister pack for each dose.*

Confirm the patient's history or risk factors for liver function. If risk factors are present, confirm the patient's Child Pugh Score/Class.

*NB for Paxlovid:*³

- *Paxlovid is contraindicated for patients with severe hepatic impairment (Child-Pugh Class C)*

Review any current medicines used by the patient and determine drug interactions

NB: Be aware of the risks and contraindications for each medicine, as outlined in the product information and as per the University of Liverpool's [COVID-19 drug interactions checker](#).

NB for Paxlovid:

- *If a contraindicated medicine is ceased to allow for treatment using Paxlovid, that medicine should continue to be ceased for three days after ceasing Paxlovid.*⁴

Confirm the patient's ability to swallow medicines

NB: The Society of Hospital Pharmacists of Australia (SHPA) have published a resource titled [Don't rush to crush](#) which provides [advice for people with swallowing difficulties or with enteral feeding tubes when prescribed Lagevrio](#). Please note that Paxlovid CAN NOT be crushed.

Determine if either medicine is appropriate for the patient:

- Lagevrio (molnupiravir)
- Paxlovid (nirmatrelvir plus ritonavir)

Determine appropriate dosage of medicine for the patient:

- Lagevrio (molnupiravir)
 - *The recommended dose for adults aged ≥ 18 years is 800 mg (four 200 mg capsules) every 12 hours for five days*
- Paxlovid (nirmatrelvir plus ritonavir)
 - *The recommended dose for adults aged ≥ 18 years is 300 mg nirmatrelvir (two 150 mg tablets) taken together with 100 mg ritonavir (one 100 mg tablet), every 12 hours for five days.*
 - *For patients with eGFR 30-60 mL/min² a lower dose of Paxlovid can be prescribed (i.e. one 150mg nirmatrelvir and one 100mg ritonavir taken every 12 hours for five days).*

Discuss the relevant medicine with the patient

Confirm and document the patient's consent for the determined medicine

Educate the patient on processes in place to access a prescription should they test positive to COVID-19. Explain how they can access a prescription after-hours where necessary (more information can be found within the [Patient education](#) section below)

On patient report of positive COVID-19 test result

Confirm the patient's positive COVID-19 test result. Document the result, test date, location and test provider (where relevant) in your clinical information system

NB: The Department of Health has confirmed that clinical judgment should be applied when verifying a positive COVID-19 status. Where a GP has a trusted relationship with their patient, verbal confirmation or a photo of the RAT result are both appropriate. If the GP is not familiar with the patient and/or is in doubt, evidence such as a photo or a PCR result (which may be accessible via My Health Record) should be requested.⁵

Determine the date of symptom onset (this must be within five days to prescribe oral treatments) and any current symptoms

NB: Patients 70 years of age or older who are assessed as suitable should be prescribed an oral treatment for COVID-19, even if asymptomatic.

Confirm that there have been no changes to the patient's medical history or medicines regime since the suitability assessment was undertaken

Reconfirm and document the patient's consent for the determined medicine

Prescribe the appropriate medicine

Send an [electronic prescription](#) for the appropriate medicine to the patient or their proxy, or have them arrange for someone to pick up the prescription for dispensing at their local pharmacy

Patient education

Explain to the patient that they need to commence the prescribed treatment within five days of symptom onset (or once they have tested positive to COVID-19 if 70 years of age or older, even if asymptomatic)

Explain how the patient can access a prescription after-hours, noting that this will vary depending on logistics and local context

NB: While it is always preferable that patients can access these treatments as soon as possible, if a patient tests positive to COVID-19 after-hours with no ability to access the treatments for the first days (for example, over a weekend), they can access their prescription when the practice re-opens if this is within five days of symptom onset. However, they should also be provided with a plan on how to access healthcare if they develop signs and symptoms of deterioration or severe disease.

Explain local isolation requirements. For more information, see [local state and territory advice](#)

Explain to the patient that they need to have someone pick up the prescribed medicines on their behalf, or they need to arrange delivery of the medicines

NB: A COVID-positive person will not be able to attend a pharmacy in person to collect these medicines. Alternative collection or delivery will need to be arranged by the patient. Some pharmacies offer a delivery service. Otherwise, the patient may forward an electronic prescription to someone who is able to collect the medicine from a pharmacy on their behalf.

Explain that, where relevant, the patient needs to pause / cease their usual medicines. Provide information on when they can recommence these medicines

Provide contraception advice for people of childbearing potential and their partners, if relevant

Provide information on how and where the patient can seek care if they develop signs and symptoms of deterioration or severe disease.

- Information for GPs is available in the RACGP's [Home-care guidelines for patients with COVID-19](#) and the National COVID-19 Clinical Evidence Taskforce's [Pathways to care](#) flowcharts
- Information for patients is available within the RACGP's [Managing COVID-19 at home](#) resource.

Further resources:

RACGP:

- [Oral treatments for COVID-19 – Prescribing information for GPs](#)
- [Home-care guidelines for patients with COVID-19](#)

NPS MedicineWise:

- [Molnupiravir \(Lagevrio\) for mild-to-moderate COVID-19](#)
- [Nirmatrelvir and ritonavir \(Paxlovid\) for mild-to-moderate COVID-19](#)

Department of Health:

- [Updated eligibility for oral COVID-19 treatments](#)
- [Oral treatments for COVID-19](#)

National COVID-19 Clinical Evidence Taskforce:

- [Oral antiviral FAQs](#)
- [Australian guidelines for the clinical care of people with COVID-19 - Nirmatrelvir plus ritonavir \(Paxlovid\) for adults](#)
- [Australian guidelines for the clinical care of people with COVID-19 - Molnupiravir \(Lagevrio\) for adults](#)

References

1. Australian Government, Department of Health. [Updated eligibility for oral COVID-19 treatments](#). Canberra; DoH, 2022 [Accessed 21 July 2022]
2. Therapeutic Goods Administration. [AUSTRALIAN PRODUCT INFORMATION – LAGEVRIO \(molnupiravir\) Capsules](#). Canberra; TGA, 2022 [Accessed 21 July 2022]
3. Therapeutic Goods Administration. [AUSTRALIAN PRODUCT INFORMATION – PAXLOVID \(nirmatrelvir/ritonavir tablets\)](#). Canberra; TGA, 2022 [Accessed 21 July 2022]
4. NPS MedicineWise. [Nirmatrelvir and ritonavir \(Paxlovid\) for mild-to-moderate COVID-19](#). New South Wales; NPS MedicineWise, 2022 [Accessed 26 July 2022]
5. Australian Government, Department of Health. [COVID-19 response update for primary care webinar – 21 July 2022](#). Canberra; DoH, 2022 [Viewed 21 July 2022]

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