

# COVID-19 TESTS EXPLAINED

There are various types of COVID-19 tests currently available in the market. It is important to understand what the different tests are, when they should be used and how they will be reimbursed.



The tests currently available in South Africa are:

## 1 RT-PCR

The Reverse Transcriptase-Polymerase Chain Reaction (RT-PCR) test is a laboratory-based test that detects the COVID-19 virus in swabs taken from the respiratory tract.

This test remains the gold standard for the diagnosis of acute infections and is recommended as the first line option for the diagnosis of COVID-19. The Scheme will pay for this test in- or out-of-hospital if requested by your treating doctor.

## 2 ANTIBODY TESTS

An antibody serological test looks for the presence of antibodies, which are specific proteins made in response to infections. Antibodies are typically detected in the blood of people who are tested after infection, meaning they show an immune response to the infection.

There are laboratory- and rapid-based antibody serological tests available in the market. Evidence shows that the sensitivity of both these tests are too low within the first two weeks of symptom onset to have a primary role for the clinical diagnosis of COVID-19. They do however have a specific role to play in the diagnosis of COVID-19 in patients **who are admitted** with suspected COVID-19 infection but, who in exceptional circumstances, tested negative with the RT-PCR test.

Laboratory-based antibody tests will therefore be paid by the Scheme from risk for members admitted into hospital. Out-of-hospital laboratory-based antibody tests will be paid from your available pathology benefit.

The rapid (point-of-care) antibody test will however not be funded at this stage as it is currently reserved for surveillance purposes.

## 3 ANTIGEN TESTS

Antigen tests are different from antibody tests and detect the presence of a specific viral antigen in your blood, which implies a current viral infection.

Their performance is however lower compared to RT-PCR and they have various other limitations, but they are still useful for repeat screening purposes, to confirm RT-PCR test results and for contact tracing.

Antigen tests will therefore be paid by the Scheme from risk for members admitted into hospital and from your available pathology benefit out-of-hospital.

We urge all our members to take extra care during this second wave of infections. As tired as we all are of wearing facemasks and practising social distancing, the risk of contracting this virus (especially with the more infectious strain we now have in South Africa) is higher than ever before.

**Don't get anxious, but stay alert and do what is necessary to safeguard your health and that of the people around you.**