SARS-CoV-2 antibody tests: Learn the essentials on new CPT codes

APR 15, 2020

Kevin B. O'Reilly
News Editor

What’s the news: The AMA Current Procedural Terminology (CPT®) Editorial Panel last week adopted two new codes to report when patients receive blood tests that detect COVID-19 antibodies. The CPT codes are now effective and can be used. Physicians and others can learn more about the CPT codes and the short, medium and long descriptors for them.

The new codes are intended for use as the industry standard for accurate reporting and tracking of blood tests performed to specifically detect antibodies associated with the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

Why it’s important: “Antibody testing that identifies patients that have been exposed to the novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) and developed an immune response is likely to have important public health implications by providing a clearer picture of the prevalence of the disease in the U.S.,” AMA President Patrice A. Harris, MD, MA, said in a statement.

“The expedited approval of new CPT codes for COVID-19 antibody tests is an important step that enhances the reporting of innovative tools now available to advance medicine’s overarching goals of reducing the COVID-19 disease burden, improving health outcomes and reducing long-term care costs,” Dr. Harris added.

Code 86328 was established for antibody tests using a single-step method immunoassay. This testing method typically includes a strip with all of the critical components for the assay and would be most appropriate for a point-of-care platform. Code 86769 was established for antibody tests using a multiple-step method.

The new Category I CPT codes and long descriptors are:

- **86328**: Immunoassay for infectious agent antibody(ies), qualitative or semiquantitative, single step method (e.g., reagent strip); severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) (Coronavirus disease [COVID-19]).
86769: Antibody; severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) (Coronavirus disease [COVID-19]).

A special edition of CPT Assistant, the official source for CPT coding guidance, offers advice about the new codes for SARS-CoV-2 serologic laboratory testing.

Also learn more with CPT Assistant about the CPT code for SARS-CoV-2 diagnostic laboratory testing.

Please note that, per the standard early release delivery process for CPT codes, you will need to manually upload these code descriptors into your EHR system. These CPT codes will arrive as part of the complete CPT code set in the data file for 2021 later this year.

Development, review and approval of the new CPT code involved broad input from practicing physicians, commercial laboratories, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other experts.

Learn more: Stay up to date on the latest on the pandemic with AMA’s COVID-19 resource center and consult this physician’s guide to COVID-19. Additionally, JAMA Network™ has a comprehensive overview of the coronavirus—including epidemiology, infection control and prevention recommendations—available on its JN Learning website.

CPT © Copyright 2020 American Medical Association. All rights reserved. AMA and CPT are registered trademarks of the American Medical Association.