



# Sentinel Lymph Node Biopsy (SLNBx) for intermediate thickness Melanoma

Last updated: 1 November 2021

- From 1 November 2021, MBS item 30311 (melanoma specific sentinel lymph node biopsy) will be introduced for patients with intermediate thickness melanoma. The procedure will determine if melanoma cells have spread to the sentinel lymph node.
- SLNBx will be available for patients with intermediate thickness melanoma ( $\geq 1.0$  mm Breslow thickness, or those  $\geq 0.8$ mm with high-risk features).
- The SLNBx procedure involves two steps. First, radioactive dye is injected around the site of the original melanoma so a camera can find the nearest lymph nodes: this is called lymphatic mapping. Second, these lymph nodes are then removed and examined under a microscope for evidence of melanoma cells.
- These changes are relevant for surgeons (General Surgeon, Plastic and Reconstructive Surgeon, ENT and procedural dermatologist) performing the procedure and for patients diagnosed with intermediate thickness melanoma, a skin cancer in the skin pigment cells.
- Currently there are no melanoma specific sentinel lymph node biopsy (SLNBx) items. This will allow for the early detection of any spread of melanoma cells to the lymph nodes nearest the site of the original melanoma lesion and determine sooner if patients will benefit from new treatments for some types of melanoma.

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## What are the changes?

From 1 November 2021, there will be a revised structure for items for sentinel lymph node biopsy or biopsies (SLNBx) for cutaneous with intermediate thickness melanoma ( $\geq 1.0$  mm Breslow thickness, or those  $\geq 0.8$ mm with high-risk features). The new structure includes:

- One new item (30311) for sentinel lymph node biopsies (SLNBx) for patients with intermediate thickness melanoma, to determine if melanoma cells have spread to the sentinel lymph nodes.

## Why are the changes being made?

- There are currently no melanoma specific sentinel lymph node biopsy items in the MBS. The introduction of this item will allow practitioners to undertake a biopsy of nearby sentinel lymph nodes (those nearest the original melanoma lesion) to determine if the cancer has spread into lymph nodes.
- Lymph nodes filter fluids from within the body and are where you find white blood cells that circulate through the body/bloodstream to help fight cancer and infections. If cancer cells reach the nearby lymph nodes, they can more easily spread further in the body.



- Sentinel nodes status is now a guide for adjuvant treatment. Patients with Stage IIIB, IIIC or IIID melanoma in the sentinel nodes would be considered eligible for PBS-subsidised adjuvant therapy.

The listing of this service was recommended by the Medical Services Advisory Committee (MSAC) in April 2021. Further details about MSAC applications can be found under [MSAC Applications](#) on the MSAC website ([Medical Services Advisory Committee](#)).

## What does this mean for providers?

SLNBx for melanoma is already being performed in Australia, but this procedure and the item numbers used (MBS 30075, 30329, 30332, 31420, 31423) are not coded on the MBS for melanoma. Providers will now use item 30311 for SLNBx for melanoma.

## How will these changes affect patients?

The changes will provide greater access for patients for Melanoma treatment services that are clinically appropriate and reflect modern clinical practice, leading to improved health outcomes.

## Who was consulted on the changes?

The Australian Society of Specialist General Surgeons, clinicians with experience and expertise in clinical oncology, pathology, dermatology and clinical genetics, and consumers were consulted on these changes.

## How will the changes be monitored and reviewed?

A predicted versus actual utilisation review of item 30311 will be conducted after two years or earlier if co-ordinated with a Drug Utilisation Sub-Committee review of the adjuvant therapies.

## Where can I find more information?

The full item descriptor(s) and information on other changes to the MBS can be found on the MBS Online website at [www.mbsonline.gov.au](http://www.mbsonline.gov.au). You can also subscribe to future MBS updates by visiting [MBS Online](#) and clicking 'Subscribe'.

The Department of Health provides an email advice service for providers seeking advice on interpretation of the MBS items and rules and the Health Insurance Act and associated regulations. If you have a query relating exclusively to interpretation of the Schedule, you should email [askMBS@health.gov.au](mailto:askMBS@health.gov.au).

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If you are seeking advice in relation to Medicare billing, claiming, payments, or obtaining a provider number, please go to the Health Professionals page on the Services Australia website or contact the Services Australia on the Provider Enquiry Line – 13 21 50.

The data file for software vendors is expected to become available on 1 November 2021 and can be accessed via the MBS Online website under the [Downloads](#) page.



*Please note that the information provided is a general guide only. It is ultimately the responsibility of treating practitioners to use their professional judgment to determine the most clinically appropriate services to provide, and then to ensure that any services billed to Medicare fully meet the eligibility requirements outlined in the legislation.*

*This sheet is current as of the Last updated date shown above, and does not account for MBS changes since that date.*