



**Ontario  
Health**

# Implementing COVID-19 Provincial Testing Guidance

Frequently Asked Questions – Retirement Homes

April 16, 2020

# Purpose

This document intends to address the most **frequently asked questions (FAQ)** in relation to the April 15<sup>th</sup> version of the “COVID-19 Provincial Testing Guidance Update” issued by the Chief Medical Officer of Health as it specifically pertains to COVID-19 testing in Retirement Homes. This document provides clarification related to testing supplies, PPE and performing tests in order to support increased testing in the province.

*\*Ontario Health will continue to update this **FAQ** document as more information becomes available and as guidance changes. This document will be updated on a regular basis.*

## Q1: WHAT IS THE NEW TESTING GUIDANCE?

**Mandatory Compliance:** COVID-19 testing must be conducted in line with the guidance issued by the Chief Medical Officer of Health on April 15, 2020

[http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/docs/2019\\_covid\\_testing\\_guidance.pdf](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/docs/2019_covid_testing_guidance.pdf)

Retirement homes are required to take all reasonable steps to immediately implement these guidelines including precautions and procedures outlined in the guidelines.

## Q2: WHAT ARE THE NEW REQUIRED CAUTIONS AND PROCEDURES FOR RETIREMENT HOMES?

Refer to directives issues by the Chief Medical Officer of Health:

[http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/dir\\_mem\\_res.aspx](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/dir_mem_res.aspx)

## Q3: WHAT IS THE PROCESS FOR OBTAINING SWABS?

The standard process for retirement homes to access swabs for COVID-19 testing is to first determine if the home has the capacity to do their own testing.

**If the home does not have the capacity, staff or training to perform their own swab tests**, the home must immediately reach out to their local Public Health Unit to coordinate the appropriate response.

**If the home does have the capacity, staff and training to perform their own swab tests**, contact your local Public Health Unit with your request for swabs and provide answers to the retirement home assessment questions seen below. Public Health Units will then bundle all the retirement home requests within their region and forward the bundled request to the Ministry of Health for assessment.

This will allow the Ministry of Health to gain a better understanding of regional volumes and swab rates in order to allocate the appropriate number of swabs based on the regional need through the Public Health Unit. The Ministry of Health will then coordinate with Public Health Ontario to have swabs delivered to the Public Health Unit or picked up if feasible.

Each time retirement homes require additional swabs, they may send their request to their local Public Health Unit, 72 hours in advance of their supply being depleted, so the Ministry of Health can allocate the appropriate number of swabs.

### **Retirement Home Assessment Questions**

- o How many swabs do you have on hand for COVID-19 testing?
- o How many residents/staff do you have in your retirement home? Do you currently have any active outbreaks?
- o What is your anticipated daily requirement for swabs based on operations to date?

In the event that a retirement home immediately requires swabs and has been unsuccessful at obtaining them through their local Public Health Unit, the retirement home may contact the Ministry of Health directly.

You can submit your request to Ashanthi Dissanayake ([Ashanthi.Dissanayake@ontario.ca](mailto:Ashanthi.Dissanayake@ontario.ca)) and Mahwesh Siddiqi ([Mahwesh.Siddiqi@ontario.ca](mailto:Mahwesh.Siddiqi@ontario.ca))

Your requests for swabs will be processed within 48 hours by Ministry of Health and forwarded to Public Health Ontario, which will coordinate the delivery or pick-up of the swabs. In general it takes 24 to 48 hours for swabs to arrive via courier. Orders can be picked up from Public Health Ontario on weekdays (8 am – 6 pm) and weekends (8 am – 5pm).

#### **Pick-up address:**

661 University Avenue – loading dock (ask for PHOL Logistics at 416-723-2016)

#### **Directions to loading dock:**

- 1) You can only access the shipping dock if you are travelling northbound on University Avenue towards College Street. If you are heading southbound there are U-turn lanes to enter the northbound lanes on University Avenue.
- 2) The 661 University Ave. loading dock driveway will be on the right (east) just south of College Street in between Toronto General Peter Munk Cardiac Centre and Aroma.

## **Q4: WHO CAN ORDER A TEST?**

Physicians and Nurse Practitioners (NP) have the authority to order the COVID-19 nasopharyngeal (NP) swab. This could be directed through a patient's primary care physician or NP, through a COVID-19 assessment center or an appropriate physician/NP who is able to do so, including a physician employed by the retirement home. In the event the retirement home does not have the appropriately staff employed to order a test, the retirement home should contact their local Public Health Unit.

The ability to order this test may also be delegated to an appropriately trained staff member (such as an RN, RPN) using specific criteria through a medical directive. In this situation, the Physician or NP will still be listed as the most responsible provider or attending practitioner for the result.

On April 8, 2020, the Ministry of Health issued an auxiliary medical directive under the Advanced Life Support Patient Care Standards Version 4.7 enabling paramedics to perform NP swab tests if authorized by their employer and local medical oversight (i.e. Base Hospital Medical Director).

CPSO number is needed to be provided in the requisition form. For requisition form for COVID-19 test, please use this [link](#). Physicians can issue a medical directive (for example in an assessment centre) to allow nurses to order tests given specific criteria.

When filling out the requisition form, make sure that patient's health card number and retirement home postal code are completed on the COVID-19 requisition form. This information is critical in ensuring that the appropriate reporting and tracking can be completed:

- **Health Card Number:** The test result can be linked to the patient’s online record, enabling online viewing of the result by the patient
- **Address:** First responders are able to look up a resident’s COVID-19 status based on the address
- **Postal Code:** The correct local Public Health Unit is notified for COVID-19-positive patients

## Q5: WHO CAN PERFORM A TEST?

Physicians or Nurse Practitioners (NP) may take a nasopharyngeal (NP) swab.

Registered Nurses (RN) or Registered Practical Nurses (RPNs) who have been trained to administer the NP swab test may do so when an order has been issued or they have been issued a directive. Additional health providers such as community paramedics, physician assistants or others may take a swab utilizing a medical directive consistent with the appropriate authorizing mechanism.

In the event that a retirement home does not have the necessary nursing resources and requires support, the retirement home should contact their local Public Health Unit and contact the RHRA if the home needs additional support to escalate.

## Q6: WHAT SHOULD LOCAL PUBLIC HEALTH UNITS DO?

Each local Public Health Unit should work with their Ontario Health regional lead to provide the appropriate resourcing to support retirement homes who require it. This may take many forms and will look different depending upon the unique characteristics of the region. It is the expectation that local Public Health Units will be in contact with retirement homes in their region in order to determine what support they may require/need. To respond to COVID-19 outbreaks, many local Public Health Units have issued a medical directive to community paramedics to quickly augment support in the retirement home.

## Q7: HOW ARE SAMPLES TRANSPORTED FROM RETIREMENT HOME TO THE LABORATORY?

There are various options for sending COVID-19 samples from retirement homes to laboratories:

1. Courier samples to a regional Public Health Ontario laboratory (PHOL). The laboratory is responsible for processing the sample, or if at capacity, re-route it to another performing laboratory. For a list of Public Health Ontario laboratories and their contact information, please use this [link](#)
2. Where a retirement home has arrangements with one of the community lab providers that are part of the provincial COVID-19 diagnostics network, samples may be directed to those facilities through existing pickup arrangement. Community laboratories that currently do the COVID-19 testing include:
  - LifeLabs
  - Dynacare
  - Alpha Labs
  - Bio-Test Laboratories

If the local PHU has a collection point, samples may be delivered there for processing or relaying COVID-19 samples. Existing regional courier routes will be leveraged (and enhanced as required) in order to provide timely collection of COVID-19 samples from Public Health Unit collection points to the assigned COVID-19 diagnostics network laboratory.

## **Q8: HOW ARE SAMPLES TESTED?**

Most of these samples will be tested at one of the Public Health Ontario Labs (either in London, Hamilton, Toronto, Ottawa, or Timmins) or community laboratories as part of the provincial diagnostics network. In the case that Public Health Ontario Labs cannot process all samples, additional capacity for retirement home samples will be provided by hospital or community laboratories.

## **Q9: HOW ARE RESULTS COMMUNICATED BACK TO THE RETIREMENT HOME?**

- The performing laboratory (e.g., Public Health Ontario Laboratories, hospital or community laboratory) that has received the sample is responsible for publishing results in the Ontario Laboratories Information System (OLIS) on behalf of the retirement home.
- The performing laboratory is also responsible for faxing results to the requisitioning retirement home. In cases where a Public Health Unit requested testing, test results will be sent to the Public Health Unit.
- In the case of a COVID-19 positive result, the performing laboratory is responsible for notifying the local Public Health Unit and the retirement home via a phone call to the site contact information provided on the requisition form. If the specimen has been requested by the Public Health Unit, the call will be made to the Public Health Unit only, which will then notify the appropriate retirement home.
- In addition, some homes may have access to PointClickCare, a clinical viewer, that could be used to review results as soon as the results are published to OLIS
- Lastly, Ontarians can easily access their COVID-19 results themselves through the provincial [online portal](#)

## **Q10: WHAT SHOULD A FACILITY DO IF THEY REQUIRE AN UNSCHEDULED TEST?**

In the event that a test is required outside of the hours in which the appropriate nursing or medical staff are available, the retirement home should immediately contact their local Public Health Unit and follow guidance issued. The Public Health Unit will determine the appropriate action, and may request a community paramedic administer a nasopharyngeal swab.

## Q11: HOW IS PPE PROVIDED TO THE RETIREMENT HOMES?

All healthcare organizations and providers in Ontario need to steward supplies and equipment, conserve when and where possible, and use supplies in accordance with the Ontario Chief Medical Officer of Health's directives and Ministry of Health guidance.

Once your organization has ascertained that, despite stewardship and conservation efforts, you have a supply shortage, we would ask that you do the following:

1. Work with your regular supplier to determine when you will get regular shipments of PPE and equipment.
2. Work with your region/regional table (see contacts below) and with other local health care providers to determine if others in your local area have supplies they can provide to you
3. If none of these actions are successful, escalate to the Ministry of Health Emergency Operations Centre (MEOC)

Over the coming days, the MEOC will be moving to an on-line request form through [EOClogistics.moh@ontario.ca](mailto:EOClogistics.moh@ontario.ca)

Region	Regional Leads - PPE and Critical Supplies
Toronto	<b>Co-Leads:</b> 1. Rob Burgess ( <a href="mailto:Robert.Burgess@sunnybrook.ca">Robert.Burgess@sunnybrook.ca</a> ) 2. Nancy Kraetschmer ( <a href="mailto:Nancy.Kraetschmer@tc.lhins.on.ca">Nancy.Kraetschmer@tc.lhins.on.ca</a> )
Central	1. Susan Gibb ( <a href="mailto:Susan.Gibb@lhins.on.ca">Susan.Gibb@lhins.on.ca</a> )
West	<b>Lead:</b> 1. Toby O'Hara ( <a href="mailto:Toby.OHara@hmms.on.ca">Toby.OHara@hmms.on.ca</a> ) – SW <b>Sub-Leads:</b> 2. Doug Murray ( <a href="mailto:Doug.Murray@grhosp.on.ca">Doug.Murray@grhosp.on.ca</a> ) – WW 3. Sue Nenadovic ( <a href="mailto:Sue.Nenadovic@niagarahealth.on.ca">Sue.Nenadovic@niagarahealth.on.ca</a> ) – HNHB 4. Katelyn Dryden ( <a href="mailto:Katelyn.Dryden@transformsso.ca">Katelyn.Dryden@transformsso.ca</a> ) – ESC
North	<b>Co-Leads:</b> 1. Matthew Saj ( <a href="mailto:sajm@tbh.net">sajm@tbh.net</a> ) 2. Michael Giardetti ( <a href="mailto:giardetm@tbh.net">giardetm@tbh.net</a> )
East	<b>Co-Leads:</b> 1. Paul McAuley ( <a href="mailto:Paul.McAuley@3so.ca">Paul.McAuley@3so.ca</a> ) 2. Leslie Motz ( <a href="mailto:lmotz@lh.ca">lmotz@lh.ca</a> )