

## Memo

**Date:**  
October 6, 2021

---

**To:** Primary care providers

**From:** Dr. David Kaplan  
Vice-President, Quality  
Ontario Health

Dr. Sacha Bhatia  
Population Health and Value-Based Health Systems Executive  
Ontario Health

**Re:** Guidance on the navigation of patients with influenza-like illness (ILI)

---

*The aim of this guidance is to outline options for primary care providers navigating patients presenting with influenza-like illness (ILI)<sup>1</sup> this fall within the context of the ongoing pandemic. This guidance is purposely high-level so that it can be adapted and implemented at the regional level. Please note that existing ILI clinics or assessment centres must have a funding agreement with Ontario Health or an alternate funding source to receive funding for COVID-19 testing.*

Patients are to be screened for COVID-19 using the Ministry of Health's [COVID-19 Patient Screening Guidance Document](#).

Patients who are experiencing at least one symptom of COVID-19 and have any of the following symptoms of severe illness should be directed to the nearest emergency department:

- Severe difficulty breathing (struggling for each breath, can only speak in single words)
- Severe chest pain (constant tightness or crushing sensation)
- Altered level of consciousness, drowsiness

More specifically for infants and children, those who should be directed to the emergency department include:

- Infants under 3 months of age with fever or trouble breathing or who appear unwell
- Children and infants over 3 months of age with any of the following:
  - Fever longer than 7 days, or immune compromised with a fever
  - Fast breathing or trouble breathing
  - Bluish skin colour
  - Not drinking enough fluids
  - Not waking up or not interacting
  - Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held

---

<sup>1</sup> CDC definition for ILI is fever 100°F or greater, oral or equivalent, and cough and/or sore throat

- Fever with a rash
- Constant vomiting

In general, patients with ILI who do not have severe symptoms as noted above may be managed using the **ILI Patient Assessment Pathways for Primary Care** (see Table 1, below). The categorization by “practice readiness” is intended to reflect the providers’ ability to implement minimum infection prevention and control ([IPAC](#)) standards needed to have in-person visits from patients with ILI symptoms.

Testing in the primary care office/clinic can be performed if the primary care provider is able to follow droplet and contact precautions, has the appropriate tools and knowledge of how to test, and can ensure coordination of sample delivery to a laboratory providing COVID-19 testing (where required).

The categorization by “access to assessment centres (ACs)” is to reflect the availability of testing centres within the primary care practice’s community, the type of testing available at each centre, and the corresponding capacity of labs in the community to support that testing.

An **ILI Assessment Centre** (in addition to COVID testing) provides assessment of other ILI conditions (e.g., strep swabs), prescription medications for bacterial conditions, and referrals for other needed diagnostic tests.

**Table 1 – ILI Patient Assessment Pathways for Primary Care**

PRACTICE READINESS	ACCESS TO ASSESSMENT CENTRES		
Practice readiness may include physical plant size, practice resources, infrastructure, personal protective equipment, hours of operation, ability to electronically submit results for rapid molecular COVID-19 tests, and established pathways for delivery to labs for lab-based PCR tests.	<b>Limited access to COVID AC in community</b>	<b>Access to COVID AC in community</b>	<b>Access to ILI AC in community</b>
<b>LOW</b> 1 or 2 providers working in a small footprint with limited ability to implement IPAC standards and limited ability to coordinate the transport of swabs to labs.	Consider seeing patients for COVID swabbing in office during designated hours when not seeing other non-COVID patients	Consider directing patient to COVID AC; with follow-up care provided by primary care provider after negative test	
<b>MEDIUM</b> 3 to 8 co-located providers working in an office with a larger footprint, the resources to implement IPAC standards, and established lab delivery pathways.	Consider seeing patients for COVID swabbing in office during designated hours when not seeing other non-COVID patients; consider being a referral site for smaller and solo providers in your area	Collaborate with local COVID AC to provide COVID testing and assessment of other ILI conditions, prescribe meds and provide follow-up support; consider becoming a regional ILI hub	If appropriate and available, direct patient to ILI AC; with note back to primary care provider via Health Report Manager (HRM)
<b>HIGH</b> More than 8 co-located providers, with or without allied health support, in a large footprint that would allow dedicated space on a different floor or in a distinct area for patients with ILI symptoms, and established lab delivery pathways.			

**Important to note:**

This memo provides overarching guidance aimed at informing all primary care providers of the *voluntary* steps they may take to access existing supports for ILI assessment. Regional leadership may provide additional guidance documentation in conjunction with this memo and implementation of any guidance remains at the regional level. As noted above, *ILI clinics or assessment centres must have a funding agreement in place with Ontario Health or an alternate funding source to receive funding for COVID-19 testing*. Primary care offices conducting COVID testing or hosting ILI clinics need to use their current specimen delivery arrangements with local labs or contact their regional testing lead. For primary care providers using ID NOW, which is a confirmatory test, these must be submitted into OLIS; contact your regional testing lead for more information.

**Resources for primary care providers**

- COVaxON Aggregate Primary Care Vaccination Report
  - Accessible via [ONE® ID account](#)
- Electronic consultations
  - [Ontario eConsult program](#)
- COVID@Home
  - [Resource toolkit: COVID@Home Monitoring for Primary Care](#)
- Provincial PPE stockpile
  - [Critical PPE, Swab Kit and Rapid Test: Intake Form](#)
- IPAC
  - [Summary of Infection Prevention and Control Key Principles for Clinical Office Practice \(publichealthontario.ca\)](#)