

Questions and Answers for Patients: Expansion of Specimen Collection for COVID-19 Testing of At-Risk Asymptomatic Persons through Ontario Pharmacies

Effective December 11, 2020

This Questions and Answers document provides information to patients on the availability of Specimen Collection for Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) COVID-19 Laboratory Testing of At-Risk Asymptomatic Persons through Ontario pharmacies.

Effective September 25, 2020, the Government of Ontario is publicly funding the collection of specimens for PCR COVID-19 laboratory testing for at-risk asymptomatic persons at select participating pharmacies in Ontario.

1. What is specimen collection for COVID-19 Testing?

Specimen collection for COVID-19 testing includes a swab test where a sample is taken from a person's nasal cavity or throat.

2. How can I get more information about the specimen collection for COVID-19 Testing?

You can find out more about specimen collection by talking to your health care provider, such as a pharmacist. Note that pharmacies will require an appointment prior to a visit to the pharmacy for specimen collection.

Please call in advance to schedule an appointment and discuss procedures with the pharmacy.

Publicly available information on COVID-19 is available on the ministry's webpage at: <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/>

3. Who can get a swab test at a pharmacy?

Individuals are eligible for pharmacy specimen collection services for PCR COVID-19 laboratory testing if they are asymptomatic for COVID-19 (i.e. not showing symptoms) and are part of a targeted testing campaign identified by the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Long-Term Care, Ministry of Seniors and Accessibility or a local public health unit. Please note

that these criteria may change from time to time depending on how the pandemic situation evolves in the province. Please visit the [Ministry of Health's website](https://www.health.gov.on.ca) for the most up-to-date information on who can get tested: <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/covid-19-test-and-testing-location-information>

As of December 11, 2020, those eligible for testing include:

- a. Residents, workers or visitors of long-term care homes
- b. Residents or workers of retirement homes
- c. Residents or workers in homeless shelters or other congregate settings
- d. International students who have passed their 14-day quarantine period
- e. Farm workers
- f. Individuals who self-identify as Indigenous

Individuals who require a COVID-19 test for international travel clearance purposes no longer qualify for a publicly funded test at a pharmacy or an assessment centre.

Individuals who live/work/volunteer in a long-term care home/retirement home; or who reside or work in a homeless shelter not currently in an outbreak may be directed to pharmacies for COVID-19 testing as part of their routine surveillance activities. These patients are advised to bring their assigned investigation number with them when attending their appointment for COVID-19 testing at the pharmacy.

Eligibility includes individuals who are eligible ODB recipients and non-ODB recipients and those without health card numbers. No eligible person will be charged for pharmacy services related to PCR COVID-19 laboratory testing, even if they do not have an Ontario health card.

Pharmacies will **not** provide a publicly funded swab test for individuals who do not meet the above criteria.

4. How do I know if I belong to an at-risk group targeted for COVID-19 testing?

At-risk populations are identified based on current public health guidelines and considerations and may change as the pandemic situation evolves. Please visit the ministry's website for up-to-date information on who can get tested: <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/covid-19-test-and-testing-location-information>

5. When can I get a swab test at a pharmacy and what do I need?

Public funding of swab tests at select participating pharmacies began **September 25, 2020** at no cost to you if you meet the criteria. Please call ahead to the pharmacy to book an appointment or to find out their procedures.

You can locate a participating pharmacy at: <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/assessment-centre-locations/>

When you go to the pharmacy, a valid Ontario health card is recommended. However, an Ontario health card is not required to receive a publicly funded swab test. Those who provide an Ontario health card (green card) will be able to access their test results online via the [ministry's access portal](#).

6. Can I get a swab test at any pharmacy?

Beginning **September 25, 2020**, publicly funded swab tests for at-risk asymptomatic individuals will be available at **some** pharmacies only.

Please contact the pharmacy in advance to inquire if the pharmacy is conducting swab tests for the purpose of PCR COVID-19 laboratory testing. The pharmacy may provide information related to the swab test before you visit and arrange for an appointment.

Participating pharmacies will be included in the [online Ontario assessment centre location finder](#) to support patients in finding a convenient location to obtain a COVID-19 test.

7. What type of test is being offered through pharmacies?

For the publicly funded PCR COVID-19 laboratory testing program, pharmacists will be performing specimen collection using a Public Health Ontario validated specimen collection method, such as an anterior nasal swab or throat swab.

For more information about specimen collection, please refer to Public Health Ontario's [website](#).

8. Why is a different specimen collection method being offered in pharmacies than in COVID-19 Assessment Centres? Is it as effective?

All specimen collection being offered in pharmacies as part of the publicly funded PCR COVID-19 laboratory testing program and COVID-19 Assessment Centres are approved by Public Health Ontario and are effective. Pharmacists are permitted to perform specimen collection in pharmacies using a Public Health Ontario validated specimen collection method, such as an anterior nasal swab or throat swab.

9. Are pharmacists prepared to administer tests? What quality standards will be followed?

Pharmacists should be familiar with specimen collection for PCR COVID-19 laboratory testing. There are many education and training materials available to pharmacists through Public Health Ontario and the Ontario Pharmacists Association. The Ontario College of Pharmacists has also issued a Guidance document for pharmacists to follow. All training materials and practice guidelines have been developed in accordance with the Ontario College of Pharmacists, Ontario Health, Public Health Ontario and the Ministry of Health to ensure quality and appropriateness.

10. I require a negative COVID-19 test prior to travelling out of the country, where can I get tested?

Effective December 11, 2020, individuals requesting a COVID-19 test for international travel clearance are not eligible for a **publicly funded** COVID-19 test in Ontario, including related specimen collection services at a participating pharmacy. You may be directed to a private testing facility such as a travel clinic.

11. What happens after the swab test at the pharmacy?

The pharmacist will provide details on the process before the swab test begins, as well as answer any other questions you may have.

If your test results indicate you *have* COVID-19 (i.e. a positive test result), the pharmacy will contact you to notify you of your positive test result. Your local public health unit will also follow up with you to inform you of your test result and to begin contact tracing.

If your test results indicate you *do not* have COVID-19 (i.e. a negative test result), you will not be contacted. Patients who provided their Ontario health card number (i.e., green card) will be able to access their test results by accessing the [online ministry portal](#).

Note that if you do not have an Ontario health card number or presented a red and white health card, the pharmacy will contact you with your results (regardless of whether you tested positive or negative).

12. Where can I get more information?

For more information related to COVID-19 and the service of swab tests, talk to your health care provider, take a [COVID-19 self-assessment](#) or visit the following webpage:

www.publichealthontario.ca/en/diseases-and-conditions/infectious-diseases/respiratory-diseases/novel-coronavirus/public-resources

To find a participating pharmacy, check out the [online Ontario assessment centre location finder](#) or visit <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/assessment-centre-locations/>