

MEDICAL HEALTH OFFICERS ALERT – March 16, 2020

Update: COVID-19 Assessment and Testing Guidance

Please note that the situation continues to evolve rapidly and the criteria for screening and testing may change.

In British Columbia (B.C.), all travellers returning from outside of Canada are now asked to self-isolate for 14 days.

Testing is available for all patients who need it, but not everyone requires a test. B.C. is currently testing those with respiratory symptoms who are: hospitalized, or likely to be hospitalized; health care workers; residents of long term care facilities; or part of an investigation of a cluster or outbreak. If an individual has no symptoms, mild symptoms, or is a returning traveller and isolating at home, they do not require a test. These groups can be managed at home. This includes returning travellers with an onset of illness within 14 days of return to Canada.

Who should be tested for COVID-19?

Patients **with respiratory symptoms** who are:

1. Hospitalized, or likely to be hospitalized
2. Health Care Workers
3. Residents of long-term care facilities
4. Part of an investigation of a cluster or outbreak.

The Approach to suspect COVID-19 cases can be found here:

<https://www.interiorhealth.ca/YourEnvironment/CommunicableDiseaseControl/Documents/Approach%20to%20Suspect%20COVID-19%20Cases%20Presenting%20in%20a%20Community%20Setting.pdf>

Further details about testing criteria are available here:

<http://www.bccdc.ca/health-professionals/clinical-resources/covid-19-care/lab-testing>

To prioritize testing *label the requisition as coming from:*

- Hospital (label as **HOSP**)
- Health Care Worker (label as **HCW**)
- Long-term care facility (label as **LTCF**)

Note: for long-term care facility outbreaks, collect samples from up to six symptomatic patients to confirm the outbreak

Who does not need to be tested for COVID-19?

1. Patients without symptoms. **The exception is health care workers with COVID-19 infection who require a negative test after symptom resolution to return to work.**
2. Patients with mild respiratory symptoms, who can be managed at home. This includes returning travellers with an onset of illness within 14 days of return to Canada.

Please advise patients, with or without a history of travel, who have respiratory symptoms that can be managed at home, to self-isolate at home for at least 14 days. After 14 days, if their temperature is normal and they feel better, they can return to their routine activities. Coughing may persist for several weeks, so a cough alone does not mean they need to continue to self-isolate for more than 14 days. People who live in the same household as a patient with respiratory symptoms are asked to self-monitor for respiratory symptoms for 14 days, and if respiratory symptoms do develop, to self-isolate. Household contacts should distance themselves from the patient (stay in separate rooms, sleep in separate beds and use separate bathrooms if possible).

Previous MHO Updates and Alerts available: <https://www.interiorhealth.ca/AboutUs/Leadership/MHO/Pages/MHOUpdates.aspx>

Chief Medical Health Officer: Dr. Sue Pollock

Medical Health Officers: Dr. Kamran Golmohammadi, Dr. Silvina Mema and Dr. Karin Goodison

Duty MHO line (24/7) 1-866-457-5648

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What samples to collect?

In the outpatient setting collect either a **Nasopharyngeal swab (NP: Preferred) OR a Throat Swab**
For patients with severe respiratory illness, collect a NP and/or Throat Swap or sputum.

- Offer them a surgical mask and place them in a separate room.
- Use contact and droplet precautions during sample collection. This includes gloves, gowns, surgical mask and eye protection. An N95 respirator is NOT necessary.



Appropriate swabs to use

Given the global swab and collection media shortage, **use either the routine Copan NP swabs used for Influenza or other respiratory virus testing, or the skin/mucosal swabs for HSV/VZV viral testing (the containers have a pink liquid in it and a red or blue cap).**

Or

The Hologic Aptima Unisex Swab Specimen Collection Kit used for endocervical and male urethra swab specimen collection. **Use the blue swab to obtain an NP, please note that it is harder and less flexible. Insert the swab gently into the deep nares and rotate the swab for 10 to 30 seconds to obtain an adequate sample. Break the swab at the scoreline and place into the transport vial.**



If you decide to test for COVID-19, please advise the patient to self-isolate until they receive a negative test result

See patient handout on page 3 or online here:

<https://www.interiorhealth.ca/YourEnvironment/CommunicableDiseaseControl/Documents/IH%20COVID-19%20Patient%20Handout%20-%20Short%20Version.pdf>

Patients may access their test results by calling the BC Centre for Disease Control COVID-19 results hotline at 1-833-707-2792 (Monday to Friday, 8:30am to 4:30pm)

Further details about self-isolation parameters can be found here:

<http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/testing-isolation>

If you have any questions or concerns, please call the Communicable Disease Unit (CDU) or On-call Medical Health Officer (MHO)

- Communicable Disease Unit (CDU) 1-866-778-7736 (M-F 8:30 to 16:30) OR
- On-call Medical Health Officer (MHO) 1-866-457-5648 (after hours and weekends)

The CDU or On call MHO can assist with the risk assessment for COVID-19 for your patient if needed

For the most up to date COVID-19 information please go to:

<https://www.interiorhealth.ca/YourEnvironment/CommunicableDiseaseControl/Pages/Breaking-News-and-Info.aspx>

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/situation-reports>

Information about the COVID-19 for patients being tested and/or cared for in the community

Your doctor has determined that you can safely be cared for at home. To prevent the spread of contagious respiratory illnesses including COVID-19, we advise that you **self-isolate at home until your test results are complete**.

Your test results will be available within 7 days. You may call the BC Centre for Disease Control Results Hotline for your test results at 1-833-707-2792 (Monday to Friday, 8:30am to 4:30pm)

Instructions for Self-Isolation

1. **Stay home except to get urgent medical care** – Do not go to work, school, or public areas (e.g. places of worship, stores, shopping malls, and restaurants). Cancel non-urgent appointments. Do not use public transportation including buses, taxis, or ride sharing. Your doctor may provide you with a note excusing you from work or school.
2. **Wear a face mask** – Wear a face mask when you are in the same room with other people and when you visit a health care facility. If your mask gets wet or dirty, change it. **Please note:** A face mask refers to a surgical/procedure mask. N95 respirator masks are not required by the patient or household contacts.
3. **Separate yourself from other people in your home** – Stay and sleep in a well-ventilated room separate from other people. Use a separate bathroom if available. Use a face mask in shared spaces. Household members should stay in another home or place of residence if possible, especially if they have compromised immune systems or chronic health conditions. Restrict visitors. However, it is ok to have friends/family drop off food or you can use delivery/pick up services for errands such as grocery shopping.
4. **Do not prepare food for others in your household**
5. **Avoid sharing household items** - Do not share dishes, cups, eating utensils, towels, bedding, or other items with people in your home. After using these items, wash them thoroughly with soap and water.
6. **Cover your coughs and sneezes** – Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough/sneeze, or cough/sneeze into your sleeve instead of your hand. Throw used tissues into a lined trash can in your room before disposal with other household waste. Immediately wash your hands.
7. **Wash your hands** – Wash your hands often and thoroughly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Use disposable paper towels when possible. For more information on handwashing see <https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthlinkbc-files/hand-washing>. If soap and water are not available, use alcohol-based sanitizer; however, always wash your hands with soap and water after using the toilet. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
8. **Flush toilet with the lid down** – the virus may also be present in stool.
9. **Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces** – Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces (e.g. counters, tabletops, doorknobs, bathroom fixtures, toilets, phones, keyboards, tablets, and bedside tables) once per day with regular household disinfectant containing 1 part bleach to 9 parts water.
10. **Notify health care facilities before you visit** – Call ahead before visiting a health-care facility, and advise them that you have or are being tested for COVID-19. Remind health-care providers when you arrive. This will help health-care facilities to take steps to keep other people from becoming infected.
11. **Monitor your symptoms** – Seek medical attention if you have trouble breathing, are unable to tolerate fluids, or if your illness is worsening. Notify health care facilities and health care providers (e.g. emergency departments, ambulance paramedics, doctors' offices) before you visit.