

## COVID-19 Surveillance Testing — Frequently Asked Questions Regarding Long-Term Care (LTC) Homes Staff Testing

July 16, 2020

### Requirements for Tests

#### **Q. Do all staff need to be tested?**

A. Yes, all staff should be tested. The health and safety of workers is a top concern during the COVID-19 (coronavirus) outbreak. This includes protecting them from exposure to infectious diseases at work. To provide a safe environment for both staff and residents, all staff need to be tested.

The testing includes all individuals working in long-term care homes, including front-line workers, management, food-service workers and contracted service providers.

#### **Q. How often do staff need to be tested?**

A. Staff need to be tested at least twice a month until further notice.

#### **Q. If staff haven't been tested in July yet, is testing twice between now and end of July still required?**

A. Rounds of testing should be about two weeks apart; if staff haven't yet been tested in July, at least one round of testing between now and end of the month is appropriate.

#### **Q. Do staff need to be tested when they return to work after an absence?**

A. Yes, all staff members should be tested to ensure the safety of both colleagues and residents.

#### **Q. Do staff need to provide consent every time they are tested?**

A. Every person obtaining a test provides consent — this includes staff members. A new consent form can be used for each round of testing or a single form can be used to indicate multiple rounds of testing. Any positive test results for any person, including staff, will be sent to the local Public Health Unit for case management (e.g., contact tracing, etc.). Local Public Health Units will notify the LTC home of any positive results.

To obtain all results (positive and negative) from the ordering clinician, LTC homes require the individual staff person's consent.

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**Q. What happens if staff refuse to be tested?**

A. The health and safety of workers is a top concern during the COVID-19 (coronavirus) outbreak. Testing results help employers protect both staff and residents from exposure to infectious diseases while on the job. Homes should follow their policies and procedures to protect health and safety of their staff and residents, including those related to staff refusal.

**Q. If staff have already been tested and the result was negative for COVID-19, do they need to be retested? Why?**

A. Yes, they do. Ongoing testing of all staff in LTC homes will help ensure the safety of both staff and residents.

Testing is done at a point in time. Existing literature indicates that the incubation period (the time from exposure to development of symptoms) of COVID-19 ranges from 2–14 days.

Retesting is necessary because the virus may not be detectable when the person was originally tested. In addition, the person may have come into contact with another person (who was symptomatic or asymptomatic) to the virus in the time after the earlier test.

**Q. Do on-site contractors who provide scheduled non-essential services for residents (e.g., hair services) need to be tested?**

A. Yes, on-site service providers working in the long-term care homes (e.g., hair services) need to be tested. For these service providers, testing can occur at an Assessment Centre and they are required to verbally attest to home staff that they have tested negative for COVID-19 within the previous two weeks and not subsequently tested positive.

*Testing Process and Availability of Test Kits/Swabs*

**Q. How will this testing be coordinated?**

A. LTC homes are asked to conduct on-site staff testing, where possible. If on-site testing is not feasible, homes may connect with their regional contacts at Ontario Health for support, or staff may be tested at a local [Assessment Centre](#). Staff going to an Assessment Centre for testing must be provided with the assigned home-specific investigation (INV) number for use by the Assessment Centre.

LTC homes are asked to connect with their Ontario Health regional contact(s) at the appropriate email address below, if they have additional questions.

- North: [OHNTesting@lhins.on.ca](mailto:OHNTesting@lhins.on.ca)
- Central: [kimberley.floyd@lhins.on.ca](mailto:kimberley.floyd@lhins.on.ca)

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- Toronto: [TRTestingIntake@tc.lhins.on.ca](mailto:TRTestingIntake@tc.lhins.on.ca)
  - East: [CovidtestingEast@ontariohealth.ca](mailto:CovidtestingEast@ontariohealth.ca)
  - West: [OHWestTesting@lhins.on.ca](mailto:OHWestTesting@lhins.on.ca)

**Q. Where can LTC homes get swab testing kits for on-site testing?**

A. LTC homes may be able to obtain swab testing kits from their local/regional distribution source. If not, the kits can be obtained directly from Public Health Ontario using an online request form, available [here](#). Please note that swabs should be ordered 72 hours in advance, to ensure timely delivery.

**Q. Going forward, will LTC homes automatically receive swabs on a bi-weekly basis or will they need to request swabs for each round of testing?**

A. LTC homes are requested to test staff at least twice a month, and they will need to acquire the necessary swabs for each round of testing from their local/regional distribution source (or from Public Health Ontario using an online request form, available [here](#)). The testing will continue until further notice.

**Q. How can the LTC home help prepare their staff for testing?**

A. The home should communicate to staff that, should they have a positive test result, they must self-isolate as soon as they learn of the result and they will receive further direction from Public Health.

Conducting the Test

**Q. Who can perform the test?**

A. The test can be performed by a physician, nurse practitioner, registered nurse or registered practical nurse. In addition, paramedics, physician assistants or other allied health professionals can perform the test.

**Q. What other human resources are available for conducting testing (e.g., mobile teams) considering LTC homes may have limited capacity to take on the significant time required to test all staff?**

A. LTC homes are asked to work towards an independent approach to staff testing. If on-site testing is not feasible, local Assessment Centres can be used, and staff are to be provided with their assigned home-specific investigation number (INV) for use by the Assessment Centre.

**Q. Can a LTC home determine their own testing dates, or will these dates be assigned from Ontario Health?**

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A. Testing dates can be determined by LTC homes, but rounds of testing should be about two weeks apart. Ontario Health or the Region may request information about each LTC home's planned testing dates and volumes in order to manage laboratory resources.

**Q. What types of swabs are available and when should they be used (e.g., nasopharyngeal, nasal only, throat and nasal)? Is it possible to do throat swabs if staff resist nasal swabs?**

A. The nasopharyngeal (NP) swab is recommended as the best choice for COVID-19 testing and provides the most accurate results. Other options can be used, which may be less sensitive and slightly less invasive, including deep nasal swabs, anterior nasal swabs and throat swabs. More information can be found on Public Health Ontario's [test information sheet](#). The choice of test should be a clinical decision made by the health care provider.

Please note, swabs distributed by Public Health Ontario are dependent on what they have available at the time; they cannot guarantee that requesters will be able to receive their preferred swab type.

**Q. How do we get personal protective equipment (PPE) to protect those doing the swabbing?**

A. Homes will use their own supply of PPE for testing purposes. Homes can connect with their Ontario Health regional contacts with any questions about PPE requirements and sourcing.

**Q. For LTC homes in active outbreak, how and when will residents and staff receive testing?**

A. Public Health Units will continue to coordinate on-site testing of residents and staff of LTC homes in active outbreak. The LTC home will work collaboratively with the Public Health Unit to ensure testing of all residents and staff is completed. This will happen as soon as possible after an outbreak has been declared.

### Requisition

**Q. Where can LTC homes get the lab requisition for staff testing?**

A. The lab requisition form is available [here](#). Each home should obtain their unique investigation (INV) number for staff testing from their established regional contact at Ontario Health. The home can re-use this number for each round of COVID-19 staff testing. The unique INV number must be entered onto the requisition form.

**Q. Who should be identified as the ordering clinician on the requisition?**

A. For on-site testing, each LTC home should determine their appropriate ordering clinician. This could be, for example, a contracted occupational health physician, or a physician or

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nurse practitioner from an external medical team. If the LTC home cannot identify an appropriate ordering clinician for on-site testing, staff should be sent to an Assessment Centre for testing. Staff going to an Assessment Centre for testing must be provided with the assigned home-specific investigation (INV) number for use by the Assessment Centre.

**Q. How will surveillance numbers (i.e., investigation [INV] numbers) be assigned for each home?**

A. A unique investigation number (INV) for each facility will be provided by your established regional contact at Ontario Health:

- North: [OHNTesting@lhins.on.ca](mailto:OHNTesting@lhins.on.ca)
- Central: [kimberley.floyd@lhins.on.ca](mailto:kimberley.floyd@lhins.on.ca)
- Toronto: [TRTestingIntake@tc.lhins.on.ca](mailto:TRTestingIntake@tc.lhins.on.ca)
- East: [CovidtestingEast@ontariohealth.ca](mailto:CovidtestingEast@ontariohealth.ca)
- West: [OHWestTesting@lhins.on.ca](mailto:OHWestTesting@lhins.on.ca)

This number can be re-used for each round of COVID-19 staff surveillance testing at the facility (indefinitely).

**Q. Does the approach for testing LTC home staff change if there is an outbreak in the home?**

A. Yes, Public Health Units will support testing in cases of an outbreak and in these cases the outbreak number will be used in the requisitions.

Labs

**For information on the routing and transportation of specimens from LTC facilities to the Provincial Diagnostic Laboratory Network, please see pages 9-11.**

Results

**Q. How are positive test results conveyed and managed (e.g., contact tracing)?**

A. The clinician(s) listed on the requisition form will receive the results directly and will notify the person of their positive result. The local Public Health Unit will contact the person to conduct case management (e.g., contact tracing) and will notify the LTC home of the staff with positive results. Staff can also access their results (positive and negative) through the [COVID-19 Test Results Website](#), if they include their (green) health card number on the requisition.

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To support timely follow-up, people should include their primary care physician's contact information on the requisition.

**Q. How can the ordering clinician ensure reports are received as soon as results are available?**

A. The ordering clinician can receive test results through auto-faxing and view results in [online electronic health record viewing solutions](#) (e.g., provincial viewers or Ontario Laboratories Information System-enabled electronic medical records).

Before submitting specimens, clinicians interested in auto-faxing should contact the testing lab to complete a fax verification process (e.g., lab faxes a new submitter and the submitter faxes back to verify the fax came to the correct number and location). The clinician should also ensure their fax machines are turned on at all times and are able to receive the expected volume of lab reports (e.g., memory capacity, toner, paper). Results that cannot be faxed will be mailed to an address provided on the requisition.

If the clinician's organization currently does not have access to an online viewing solution, they may complete the [online form](#) to submit a request.

**Q. How can LTC homes get the results of their staff's tests (all results, not just positives)? Should a consent form be used?**

A. Local Public Health Units will notify the LTC home of any positive results. To obtain all results (positive and negative), LTC homes must develop a process for staff to provide consent to have this information released to the home by the ordering clinician or for staff to share their results directly.

**Q. Do LTC homes need to collect and track any statistical information on the number of staff swabs collected and the results?**

A. Where possible, LTC homes are asked to keep statistical information about the number of staff tested and the dates on which testing was conducted.

In managing testing information, homes must continue to adhere to the requirements of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act and the Personal Health Information Protection Act.

**Q. Do LTC homes need to report this information?**

A. Homes are not required to report the available information proactively. Statistical information, however, may be requested by the Ministry of Long-Term Care, the Public Health Unit for the area in which the LTC home is located and Ontario Health.

In managing testing information, homes must continue to adhere to the requirements of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act and the Personal Health Information Protection Act.

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**Q. Are there any other reporting requirements related to positive test results?**

A. If an employer is advised that a worker has tested positive for COVID-19 due to exposure at the workplace, or that a claim has been filed with the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB), the employer is required to give notice in writing within four days to:

- The Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development
- The workplace's joint health and safety committee or a health and safety representative
- The worker's trade union (if applicable)

Additionally, the employer must report any instances of occupationally acquired illnesses to the WSIB within three days of receiving notification of said illness.

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## Contacts

### Q. Where can I get more information?

A. It depends on the information you seek.

### Surveillance, On-Site Testing, PPE

For information about surveillance (such as, investigation [INV] numbers), on-site testing at the LTC home or PPE requirements and sourcing, contact your established regional contact at Ontario Health at one of the following email addresses below:

- North: [OHNTesting@lhins.on.ca](mailto:OHNTesting@lhins.on.ca)
- Central: [kimberley.floyd@lhins.on.ca](mailto:kimberley.floyd@lhins.on.ca)
- Toronto: [TRTestingIntake@tc.lhins.on.ca](mailto:TRTestingIntake@tc.lhins.on.ca)
- East: [CovidtestingEast@ontariohealth.ca](mailto:CovidtestingEast@ontariohealth.ca)
- West: [OHWestTesting@lhins.on.ca](mailto:OHWestTesting@lhins.on.ca)

**Swab Test Kits** - To obtain swab testing kits contact your local/regional distribution source or use the online request form, available [here](#), to obtain them directly from Public Health Ontario.

**Lab Test Results for Staff** - Local Public Health Units will notify the LTC home of any positive results.

Any individual with a green Ontario health card (photo card) seeking results of COVID-19 lab tests (including staff members of LTC homes) may visit the [COVID-19 Test Results Website](#). This web-based tool provides access to COVID-19 test results from the Ministry of Health.

**Testing of Staff Policy** - The Ministry of Long-Term Care Home Action Line/Family Support Line, at [1-866-434-0144](tel:1-866-434-0144), between 8:30 am and 7:00 pm, seven days a week.

**Testing of Residents, Policies for Visitors** – Any testing of residents should be according to provincial testing guidance. This and other COVID-19 guidance, including for visitors, can be found [here](#).



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## Routing and transportation of specimens from LTC facilities to the Provincial Diagnostic Laboratory Network

July 16, 2020

### Summary:

The following points will help ensure effective processing and optimal turnaround time for surveillance testing of LTC staff:

- **LTC home staff may get tested for COVID-19 at any Assessment Centre.** Staff must bring a requisition form which must include their LTC home's assigned staff investigation (INV) number.
- **Each region has been tagged to a laboratory that will be the primary site for LTC home staff screening volumes.** In some cases, these are community labs; in this circumstance the community lab that has a relationship with the specific LTC home should be engaged to pick up and process COVID-19 tests. The LTC home should contact the community lab at least 48 hours before the planned test collection in order to make arrangements.

Ontario Health Region	Performing Lab
North	PHO Labs (Thunder Bay, Sault Ste Marie, Sudbury, Timmins) or Health Sciences North
West	PHO Labs (London, Hamilton)
Toronto	PHO Labs (Toronto)
Central	Community Labs
East	Community Labs

- **Where the LTC home is affiliated with a hospital that is part of the provincial COVID-19 diagnostics network, and that lab has been processing COVID-19 specimens for the LTC facility with the capacity to continue doing so, the LTC home should continue to route to the hospital lab.**
- **The LTC home is responsible for arranging transportation to deliver specimens to the designated laboratory.** Where the LTC home is sending specimens to a Public Health Lab, they may engage their community lab to support pickup and delivery of the specimens to that lab. The LTC home should contact the community lab at least 48 hours before the planned test collection in order to make arrangements. The LTC home is responsible for the costs of specimen transportation.
- **Specimens should be sent to a COVID-19 diagnostics laboratory on the day of collection.** Specimens should not be kept on-site at the LTC home overnight.

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## Lab Role & Responsibilities:

All laboratories in the COVID-19 diagnostics network share a common set of responsibilities and expectations related to testing. **Community laboratories have assembled guidance documents to support LTC homes; these outline specific processes related to their pickup process and will assist in planning.**

- **Pickup of specimens:** The laboratories will leverage and where possible expand on existing routes to support the collection of specimens for COVID-19 testing. They will provide guidance on proper handling and preparation of specimens for pickup. They will not be involved in collection of samples from staff or residents.
- **Reporting to the submitter:**
  - **Positive results:** The lab will communicate positive results by fax / laboratory information system (LIS). For specimens that have an indicated investigation number (INV), the lab will also phone the submitter to notify of the first positive result from that investigation.
  - **Negative results:** The lab will communicate negative results by fax / LIS.

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## Appendix:

### Completion of the requisition form

- **All sites must complete the Public Health Ontario requisition form for COVID-19 tests**, regardless to which lab the specimen is being sent. The form can be found here: <https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/lab/2019-ncov-test-requisition.pdf?la=en>
- **All fields on the requisition form should be completed to ensure accurate and timely reporting of results to the submitter and Public Health Unit.**
- For section 2 ('Patient Information'):
  - For healthcare workers at a LTC facility, please use the home address of the healthcare worker
  - **It is important to note the investigation number** in the appropriate field on the form so that this can be provided on the lab report and tracked by Public Health.
- The specimen collection date must be entered accurately so the lab can assess how much time has passed since the specimen was collected.

### Safe Specimen Handling and Transport

Specimens for COVID-19 testing should be handled and transported according to the *Transportation of Dangerous Goods Act* and its Regulations:

<https://www.tc.gc.ca/eng/tdg/safety-menu.htm>

It is the responsibility of the sender to adhere to these Regulations.

Useful tips:

- Place COVID-19 specimens in sealed biohazard bags and include the requisition in the outer pouches; the requisition should not be in contact with the specimen
- Place the individual biohazard bags together in sealed large plastic bags, along with some absorbent material (e.g., paper towels)
- Place the large plastic bags into a rigid outer shipping container
- Address and label the outer shipping container with "UN3373" and "COVID-19 specimens"
- Store specimens at 2-8°C until shipping and include frozen ice packs in the container