

COVID-19 Surveillance Testing – Guidance Regarding Long-Term Care (LTC) Homes Staff Testing

June 3, 2020

FAQs

Swabs & Testing Process

Q. Is the June staff testing (per May 31 memo) a directive or recommendation?

A. The memo from the Ministry of Long-Term and Ontario Health on May 31, 2020, recommends that all LTC home staff be tested, at reasonable intervals, at least twice in June. While this is not a mandatory requirement, the intent is that all staff in all homes are tested to help protect the health of residents and staff and prevent the spread of infection.

Q. Will this testing be coordinated through Public Health?

A. LTC homes are asked to work towards an independent approach to 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. Public Health Units will maintain their key role in managing outbreak testing for LTC homes.

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](#).

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 being asked to test staff at least twice in the month of June, 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 Ministry of Long-Term Care will provide further direction beyond June.

Q. What is the purpose of re-swabbing asymptomatic health care staff twice in a four week period?

A. Testing all staff in LTC homes will help ensure the safety of both staff and residents. This recommendation to test staff twice in June is part of the province's efforts to gain further understanding to inform the ongoing development of the provincial testing strategy. The Ministry of Long-Term Care will provide further direction about testing beyond June.

Q. If an LTC home has already tested their staff, do they need to re-test?

A. If staff have been tested within the last week, there is no need to re-test until the second or third week of June. All staff should be tested at least twice within a four-week period. The time period between testing should be as close to two weeks as can practically be achieved.

Q. If a staff member was previously reported as positive for COVID-19, do they need to be tested again?

A. No – staff who were previously positive should not need to be tested as part of the surveillance testing in June. However, the local Public Health Unit may provide other instructions as part of their management of a COVID-19 positive case or an outbreak.

Q. What are the outcomes if staff refuse testing?

A. Testing is voluntary for staff.

Q. Who can perform the test?

A. The test can be performed by a physician or NP. In addition, RNs, RPNs, and paramedics can perform the test under medical direction.

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 may be used as long as staff are provided with their assigned home-specific investigation number for use by the Assessment Centre.

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

A. Testing is voluntary. Staff will need to provide consent to be tested and to have the results released to the LTC home every time they are tested, if the home requires the results directly. Any positive test results will be sent to the PHU for case management.

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

A. Testing dates can be determined by the LTC homes, although each round 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 swabbing 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 the best choice for testing and provides the most accurate results. There are other options that are slightly less invasive – these would be deep nasal swabs, anterior nasal swabs and throat swabs. More information can be found on PHOs [test information sheet](#). However, the choice of test should be clinical decision to be made by the health care provider.

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.

Requisition

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

A. A unique investigation (INV) number each LTC home should be obtained from the LTC home’s established regional contact at Ontario Health or from the Ontario Health testing implementation team (covid19testing@ontariohealth.ca). The LTC home can re-use this number for each round of staff testing. The unique investigation number must be entered onto the requisition form, available [here](#).

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

A. Each LTC home should determine their appropriate ordering clinician. This could be, for example, the medical director, a contracted occupational health physician, or a physician or nurse practitioner from an external medical team.

Q. How will surveillance numbers (i.e., investigation [INV] numbers) be assigned for each home? Will two numbers be assigned to correspond to the two rounds of testing?

A. A unique investigation number for each facility can be provided by your established regional contact at Ontario Health, or by the Ontario Health testing implementation team (covid19testing@ontariohealth.ca). This number can be re-used for each instance 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. Public Health Units will support testing in cases of 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 6-7.

Results

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

A. The local Public Health Unit will notify the individual of positive results and will conduct contact tracing, including notifying the home of staff with positive results. The clinician(s) listed on the requisition forms will receive the results directly, so it is recommended to include the primary care physicians on the requisition to support timely follow-up. By including health card numbers on the requisitions, staff can access their results (positive and negative) through the online portal.

Q. How can LTC homes get the results of their staff's tests (i.e., all results, not only 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.

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

A. LTC homes are not required to collect or report surveillance testing data; data collection will be achieved through the use of the home-specific investigation (INV) number on the requisition forms. However, LTC homes should consider developing their own processes to assist with test scheduling and tracking.

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

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- The worker's trade union (if applicable)

Additionally, any instances of occupationally acquired illnesses shall be reported to WSIB within 3 days of receiving notification of said illness.

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

June 3, 2020

Summary:

The following points will assist in ensuring effective processing and optimal turnaround time for LTC staff testing:

- **LTC facility staff may attend any Assessment Centre to have a COVID specimen collection.** They will be required to bring the assigned Investigation Number with them to the Assessment Centre; this number must be included on the requisition.
- **Each region has been tagged to a laboratory that will be the primary site for LTC facility staff screening volumes.** In some cases these are community labs; in this circumstance the community lab that has a relationship with the specific LTC facility should be engaged to pick-up and process COVID-19 tests. The LTC facility should contact the community lab at least 48-hours prior to the planned test collection in order to make arrangements.

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

- **Where the LTC facility 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 facility should continue to route to the hospital lab.**
- **The LTC facility is responsible for arranging transportation to deliver specimens to the designated laboratory.** Where the LTC facility 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 facility should contact the community lab at least 48-hours prior to the planned test collection in order to make arrangements.

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 operators; 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 / LIS. For specimens that have an indicated investigation number, 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

Appendix:

Completion of the requisition form

- **All sites must complete the PHO requisition form for COVID-19 tests**, regardless to which lab the specimen is being sent to. 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 must 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 outbreak number or investigation number** in the appropriate field on the form so that this can be provided on the lab report and tracked by Public Health.

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/clear-tofc-211.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.
- Place the large plastic bags into a rigid outer shipping container.
- Address and label the container with "UN3373" and "COVID-19 specimens."
- Store specimens at 2-8°C until shipping and include frozen ice packs in the container.