

## Respiratory Outbreak Testing Prioritization Protocol

October 22, 2020

### **All confirmed and suspect outbreaks should be managed in consultation with your local Public Health Health Unit.**

- **Ensuring appropriate turnaround time is a joint responsibility shared by the submitter, the health unit, the testing lab, and the provincial laboratory network.**
- Diagnostic testing for declared outbreaks will continue to be processed by the Public Health Ontario (PHO) Laboratory as a priority.
  - If the Local Public Health Unit (PHU) has assigned a closer laboratory with a prioritization approach to outbreak samples this laboratory may be used to reduce the turnaround time.
- During the response to COVID-19, delays in processing outbreak specimens have been observed due to longer transportation times as well as challenges in differentiating outbreak specimens from non-outbreak specimens when they are received at the testing laboratory.
- In order to prioritize outbreak samples, the PHU must alert the lab to them ahead of sending using the PHO notification process, ensure that these samples are packaged and shipped in a separate courier bag with colour identification on both the exterior of the courier bag and accompanied by coloured requisitions, and shipped to the closest PHO (or other) lab immediately after collection.

### **Instructions for health units and facilities in preparing and processing COVID-19 outbreak specimens**

To ensure timely turnaround of outbreak specimens, please follow the steps below.

1. Before collection of specimens
  - ✓ PHU declares an outbreak and assigns an outbreak number.
  - ✓ PHU submits details on the outbreak to PHO Laboratory through the established [PHOL notification process](#)
  - ✓ PHU provides COVID-19 outbreak specimen management protocol (this document) and guidance to the LTCH or facility impacted by the outbreak to ensure proper handling and management
2. During collection of specimens
  - ✓ Print requisition on green paper (If green paper is not available use a different color paper. Do not use white paper for outbreak specimens; using white paper will delay timely identification and prioritization of specimens)

- ✓ Ensure proper information (including the outbreak number) is clearly included on each requisition
- ✓ Include clear identification on the outside of the specimen transport bag; preference is a bright green insert in the transparent pocket on the bag with the text “Outbreak Specimens: **OB# XXXX-YYYY-#####**” (see template on page 3).
- ✓ Ensure appropriate packaging of specimens as per Transport Canada’s **COVID-19: Requirements for safe transportation of infectious substances (Class 6.2)** (<https://tc.canada.ca/en/dangerous-goods/covid-19-requirements-safe-transportation-infectious-substances-class-62>)
- ✓ Expedite transport of outbreak specimens to the nearest PHO laboratory site via urgent courier or taxi (do not wait for a daily scheduled courier; contact provincial network if additional support is required) See: <https://tc.canada.ca/en/dangerous-goods/temporary-certificates/temporary-certificate-tu-0764-test-samples-covid-19>

### 3. Following submission

- ✓ In case of delayed outbreak results PHUs should contact the testing laboratory.
- ✓ For specimens tested by PHO Laboratory contact CustomerServiceCentre@oahpp.ca
- ✓ For further support contact PHO Laboratory Customer Service Centre (CustomerServiceCentre@oahpp.ca) and the Provincial Network issues management team (COVID-19.diagnostics@ontariohealth.ca)

Transportation bag tag template.

Print on colored paper and fold at dashed line. Insert in clear pocket.

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# Outbreak Specimens:

**OB#**     -     -

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