

## **COVID-19 Surveillance Testing – Guidance Regarding Retirement Homes Staff and Resident Testing**

June 9, 2020

### **FAQs**

#### *Swabs & Testing Process*

**Q. Is the testing (per June 9 memo) a directive or recommendation?**

A. The memo from the Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility and Ontario Health on June 9, 2020, recommends testing of all retirement home staff (e.g., front-line workers, management, food-service workers, contracted service providers, basic aids and guest attendants) every two weeks, and of residents of retirement homes at risk of outbreaks. While this is not a mandatory requirement, the intent of this testing is to help protect the health of residents and staff and prevent the spread of infection.

**Q. When will the testing begin?**

A. Testing will begin this month.

**Q. For how long will the testing continue?**

A. In the coming weeks and months, testing results will be monitored to inform the longer-term testing plan for retirement homes.

**Q. How will retirement homes be identified as “high priority” (i.e., red and yellow category homes based on Public Health Unit assessment) for testing?**

A. Public Health Units continue to monitor retirement homes and will identify homes at risk of outbreaks (i.e., red and yellow category homes) based on factors including infection prevention and control (IPAC) interventions, personal protective equipment (PPE) supply, and staffing needs. These homes should have their residents tested in addition to bi-weekly staff testing. The Ontario Health Regions will contact the identified homes to help coordinate testing.

Please note that the categorization of retirement homes into red, yellow and green is based on an assessment of rate of COVID infection; IPAC and environmental interventions; PPE supply; and, staffing shortages. This information is used to make necessary interventions – like deploying IPAC supports, PPEs, and

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staffing – by Public Health Units as well as Ontario Health Regions. As such, this categorization doesn't denote overall quality of care at a specific retirement home.

**Q. Who will conduct the bi-weekly staff testing and where will it take place?**

A. Staff should be tested at a local [Assessment Centre](#). The retirement home must provide each staff member with a [requisition form](#) for testing. This form must include an assigned, home-specific staff investigation (INV) number for use by the Assessment Centre.

**Q. Who will conduct the staff and resident testing for the “high priority” retirement homes (i.e., red and yellow category homes based on Public Health Unit assessment)?**

A. Staff and residents may be tested through on-site testing at the retirement home. They will need a requisition form with the home-specific investigation (INV) number for staff or residents, and a physician or nurse practitioner (or appropriately trained staff member delegated through a medical directive) listed as the ordering clinician who will receive the test results.

The Ontario Health Regions will contact retirement homes identified as red or yellow by Public Health Units to provide their home-specific INV numbers and help coordinate this testing. Retirement 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)
- Toronto: [TRTestingIntake@tc.lhins.on.ca](mailto:TRTestingIntake@tc.lhins.on.ca)
- East: [covid19testing@ontariohealth.ca](mailto:covid19testing@ontariohealth.ca)
- West: [OHWestTesting@lhins.on.ca](mailto:OHWestTesting@lhins.on.ca)

Public Health Units will maintain their key role in managing outbreak testing for retirement homes.

**Q. Where can retirement homes get swab testing kits if they have the capacity, staff and training to conduct their own on-site surveillance testing?**

A. Retirement 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 (PHO) by completing the online request form, available [here](#). Homes should submit their orders at least 48 hours in advance to help ensure test kits arrive in time for the scheduled testing date. Swab kits are provided to retirement homes free of charge.

**Q. For retirement 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 retirement homes in active outbreak. The retirement home will work collaboratively with the Public Health Unit to ensure

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testing of all residents and staff is completed. This will happen as soon as possible after an outbreak has been declared.

**Q. What is the purpose of re-swabbing asymptomatic health care staff every two weeks?**

A. Testing all staff in retirement homes will help ensure the safety of both staff and residents. This recommendation to test staff bi-weekly is part of the province's efforts to gain further understanding to inform the ongoing development of the provincial testing strategy.

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

A. The retirement home should communicate to asymptomatic 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.

**Q. If a retirement 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 two weeks have passed. 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. 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. Is testing of staff and residents voluntary?**

A. Yes – testing is voluntary.

**Q. For retirement homes assessed as red or yellow by Public Health Units, who can perform the test?**

A. The test can be performed by a physician or nurse practitioner. In addition, registered nurses, registered practical nurses, physician assistants and paramedics can perform the test under medical direction of a physician or nurse practitioner.

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

A. Testing is voluntary. Staff and residents will need to agree to be tested and provide consent to have the results released to the retirement home, if the home requires the results directly. Consent will need to be provided every time the person is to be tested, or can be based on a list of testing dates. Any positive test results will be sent to the local Public Health Unit for case management.

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**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/residents 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 PHO’s [test information sheet](#). The choice of test should be a clinical decision to be made by the health care provider.

**Q. How do we get 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.

### *Requisition*

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

A. The lab requisition form is available [here](#). Each retirement home should obtain their unique investigation (INV) numbers (one for staff and another for residents) from their established regional contact at Ontario Health. The retirement home can re-use these numbers for each round of staff testing and resident 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. Physicians and nurse practitioners are authorized to order COVID-19 tests. The ability to order a test can also be delegated to appropriately trained staff (e.g., registered nurse, registered practical nurse) through a medical directive. Each retirement home should determine their appropriate ordering clinician and may consult their Ontario Health regional contact for support. The ordering clinician could be, for example, a physician employed by the home or a physician or nurse practitioner from an external medical team.

**Q. How will investigation (INV) numbers be assigned for each home? Will multiple numbers be assigned to correspond to the bi-weekly rounds of testing?**

A. Two unique INV numbers for each retirement home – one for staff testing and one for resident testing – 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: [covid19testing@ontariohealth.ca](mailto:covid19testing@ontariohealth.ca)
- West: [OHWestTesting@lhins.on.ca](mailto:OHWestTesting@lhins.on.ca)

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These investigation numbers can be re-used for each round of COVID-19 surveillance testing for staff or residents from the retirement home (indefinitely).

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

A. Public Health Units will support testing in cases of outbreak. In these cases the outbreak number will be used on the requisitions.

*Labs*

**For information on the routing and transportation of specimens from retirement homes to the Provincial Diagnostic Laboratory Network, please see pages 7-9.**

*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 contact tracing, and will notify the retirement home of the staff and/or residents with positive results. Staff and residents can also access their results (positive and negative) through the [online portal](#) if they include their health card number on the requisition.

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/or the online [eHealth Portal](#). Clinicians interested in auto-faxing should call the PHO Customer Service Centre at (416) 235-6556 to sign up, prior to submitting specimens. They 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.

**Q. How can retirement homes get the results of their staff's and residents' tests (i.e., all results, not only positives)? Should a consent form be used?**

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

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

A. Retirement 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) numbers (one for staff and another for residents) on the requisition forms. However, retirement 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
- The worker's trade union (if applicable)

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

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## Routing and transportation of specimens from retirement homes to the Provincial Diagnostic Laboratory Network

June 9, 2020

### Summary:

The following points will assist in ensuring effective processing and optimal turnaround time for surveillance testing of retirement home staff and residents:

- **Retirement home staff may get tested for COVID-19 at any Assessment Centre.** Staff must bring a requisition form which must include their retirement home's assigned staff investigation (INV) number.
- **Each region has been tagged to a laboratory that will be the primary site for retirement home staff and resident screening volumes.** In some cases these are community labs; in this circumstance the community lab that has a relationship with the specific retirement home should be engaged to pick-up and process COVID-19 tests. The retirement home 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
<b>North</b>	PHO Labs (Thunder Bay, Sault Ste Marie, Sudbury, Timmins) / HSN
<b>West</b>	PHO Labs (London, Hamilton)
<b>Toronto</b>	PHO Labs (Toronto)
<b>Central</b>	Community Labs
<b>East</b>	Community Labs

- **Where the retirement 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 retirement home with the capacity to continue doing so, the retirement home should continue to send specimens to the hospital lab.
- **The retirement home is responsible for arranging transportation to deliver specimens to the designated laboratory.** Where the retirement 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 retirement home should contact the community lab at least 48-hours prior to the planned test collection in order to make arrangements.
- **Specimens should be sent to a COVID-19 diagnostics network laboratory on the day of collection.** Specimens should not be kept on-site at the retirement home overnight.

### 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 retirement**

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home operators. These documents outline specific processes related to the labs' pickup processes 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. The labs will not be involved in collecting 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, the lab will also phone the submitter to notify them 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 of 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 retirement home, please use the home address of the healthcare worker.
  - **It is important to note the outbreak number or investigation (INV) number** in the appropriate field on the form so that this can be provided on the lab report and tracked by Public Health.
- For detailed instructions, please see the attached *COVID-19 Requisition Completion Instructions* document.

### 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.

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- 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.