

Questions and Answers for Patients: Expansion of Specimen Collection for COVID-19 Testing of At-Risk Asymptomatic Persons through Ontario Pharmacies

This Questions and Answers document provides information to patients on the availability of Specimen Collection for COVID-19 Testing of At-Risk Asymptomatic Persons through Ontario pharmacies.

Effective September 25, 2020, the Government of Ontario is permitting specimen collection for COVID-19 Testing for at-risk asymptomatic persons at select participating pharmacies in Ontario.

1. What is specimen collection for COVID-19 Testing?

Specimen collection for COVID-19 testing includes a swab test where a sample is taken from a person's nasal cavity or throat.

2. How can I get more information about the specimen collection for COVID-19 Testing?

You can find out more about specimen collection by talking to your health care provider, such as a pharmacist. Note that pharmacies will require an appointment prior to a visit to the pharmacy for testing.

Please call in advance to schedule an appointment and discuss procedures with the pharmacy.

Publicly available information on COVID-19 is available on the ministry's webpage at: <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/>

3. Who can get a swab test at a pharmacy?

Individuals are eligible for testing in pharmacies if they are asymptomatic for COVID-19 (i.e. not showing symptoms) and fall under one of the following categories:

1. Eligible for testing as part of a targeted testing initiative as determined by the Ministry of Health or Ministry of Long-term Care or public health. This includes:
 - a. residents, workers or visitors in long-term care homes

- b. residents or workers in homeless shelters or other congregate settings
 - c. international students who have passed their 14-day quarantine period
 - d. farm workers
 - e. individuals who self-identify as Indigenous.
2. Require a COVID-19 test for international travel clearance purposes.

Individuals who reside or work in a long-term care home or homeless shelter not currently in an outbreak may be directed to pharmacies for COVID-19 testing as part of their routine surveillance activities.

Eligibility includes individuals who are eligible ODB recipients and non-ODB recipients and those without health card numbers. No eligible person will be charged for a COVID-19 test at a pharmacy, even if they do not have an Ontario health card.

Pharmacies will **not** provide a swab test for individuals who do not meet the above criteria.

4. How do I know if I belong to an at-risk group targeted for COVID-19 testing?

At-risk populations are identified based on current public health guidelines and considerations and may change as the pandemic situation evolves.

Currently, if you are a member of one of the listed groups below, you will qualify for a pharmacy-based COVID-19 test:

- i. resident, worker, or visitor of a long-term care home*
- ii. resident or worker in homeless shelter*, or other congregate setting
- iii. international student that has passed their 14-day quarantine period
- iv. farm worker
- v. self-identify as Indigenous

If you require a COVID-19 test for travel clearance, you can also qualify.

* Patients who reside or work in a long-term care home or a homeless shelter not currently in an outbreak may be directed to pharmacies for COVID-19 testing as part of their routine surveillance activities. These patients will be identified during pharmacy screening calls and should be reminded to bring their assigned investigation number with them when attending their appointment for COVID-19 testing at the pharmacy.

5. When can I get a swab test at a pharmacy and what do I need?

Public availability of swab tests at select participating pharmacies begins **September 25, 2020** at no cost to you if you meet the criteria. Please call ahead to the pharmacy to book an appointment or to find out their procedures.

You can locate a participating pharmacy at: <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/assessment-centre-locations/>

When you go to the pharmacy, a valid Ontario health card is recommended. However, an Ontario health card is not required to receive a swab test. Those who provide an Ontario health card (green card) will be able to access their test results online via the [ministry's access portal](#).

6. Can I get a swab test at any pharmacy?

Beginning **September 25, 2020**, swab tests for at-risk asymptomatic individuals will be available at **some** pharmacies only.

Please contact the pharmacy in advance to inquire if the pharmacy is conducting swab tests for the purpose of COVID-19 testing. The pharmacy may provide information related to the swab test before you visit and arrange for an appointment.

Participating pharmacies will be included in the [online Ontario assessment centre location finder](#) to support patients in finding a convenient location to obtain a COVID-19 test.

7. What type of test is being offered in pharmacies?

Pharmacists will be performing specimen collection using a Public Health Ontario validated specimen collection method, such as an anterior nasal swab or throat swab.

For more information about specimen collection, please refer to Public Health Ontario's [website](#).

8. Why is a different test being offered in pharmacies than in COVID-19 Assessment Centres? Is it as effective?

All tests being offered through pharmacies and COVID-19 Assessment Centres are approved by Public Health Ontario and are effective. Pharmacists are permitted to perform specimen collection in pharmacies using a Public Health Ontario validated specimen collection method, such as an anterior nasal swab or throat swab.

9. Are pharmacists prepared to administer tests? What quality standards will be followed?

Pharmacists should be familiar with specimen collection for COVID-19 testing. There are many education and training materials available to pharmacists through Public Health Ontario and the Ontario Pharmacists Association. The Ontario College of Pharmacists has also issued a Guidance document for pharmacists to follow. All training materials and practice guidelines have been developed in accordance with the Ontario College of Pharmacists, Ontario Health, Public Health Ontario and the Ministry of Health to ensure quality and appropriateness.

10. What happens after the swab test at the pharmacy?

The pharmacist will provide details on the process before the swab test begins, as well as answer any other questions you may have.

If your test results indicate you *have* COVID-19 (i.e. a positive test result), the pharmacy will contact you to notify you of your positive test result. Your local public health unit will also follow up with you to inform you of your test result and to begin contact tracing.

If your test results indicate you *do not* have COVID-19 (i.e. a negative test result), you will not be contacted. Patients who provided their Ontario health card number (i.e., green card) will be able to access their test results by accessing the [online ministry portal](#).

Note that if you do not have an Ontario health card number or presented a red and white health card, the pharmacy will contact you with your results (regardless of whether you tested positive or negative).

11. Where can I get more information?

For more information related to COVID-19 and the service of swab tests, talk to your health care provider, take a [COVID-19 self-assessment](#) or visit the following webpage:

www.publichealthontario.ca/en/diseases-and-conditions/infectious-diseases/respiratory-diseases/novel-coronavirus/public-resources

To find a participating pharmacy, check out the [online Ontario assessment centre location finder](#) or visit <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/assessment-centre-locations/>