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**SUBJECT:** Testing and Antiviral Treatment for COVID-19 and Influenza  
**Date:** February 9, 2026  
**Pages:** 2  
**To:** Primary Care Providers; Emergency Departments  
**From:** Dr. Matthew Tenenbaum, Associate Medical Officer of Health

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- **COVID-19 antivirals require a positive test**
- **Influenza antivirals can be started without testing when clinically indicated**
- **Do not order combined COVID-19/influenza or multiplex respiratory testing for outpatients; these requests may be rejected based on PHO eligibility criteria**

Respiratory viruses, including COVID-19 and influenza, are currently circulating in our community. Timely initiation of antiviral treatment can reduce the risk of severe outcomes.

This advisory is intended to help with navigating provincial testing requirements that affect access to antiviral treatment. Testing eligibility criteria are established and applied by Public Health Ontario (PHO); WDG Public Health does not set or modify these criteria.

## COVID-19

Antiviral therapy with nirmatrelvir/ritonavir (Paxlovid) is recommended for patients with non-severe COVID-19 who are at increased risk of severe outcomes, including:

- Adults 65 years of age or older
- Adults 18 years of age or older who are immunocompromised

Paxlovid should be initiated within **5 days of symptom onset** and requires a positive COVID-19 test using one of the following:

1. Rapid antigen test (RAT)
  - a. May be obtained via participating pharmacies or ordered through the [Provincial Antigen Testing Program](#).
2. PCR testing at Public Health Ontario (PHO)
  - a. Use the [PHO General Test Requisition form](#).

### Important testing clarification – to avoid rejected specimens

When testing is done prior to COVID-19 antiviral therapy, order COVID-19 testing only.

PHO restricts eligibility for non-COVID respiratory virus testing in community settings, generally limiting testing to hospitalized patients or outbreak-related situations. As a result, specimens submitted for combined COVID-19/influenza or multiplex testing may be rejected, even when COVID-19 testing is required to initiate antiviral therapy.

To avoid rejected specimens, do not include influenza or other respiratory viruses on the test requisition unless the patient also meets PHO's eligibility criteria for those tests.

**WDG Public Health Physicians Advisory**  
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**February 9, 2026**  
Page 2 of 2

For more information, please refer to [clinical guidance from Ontario Health](#).

### **Influenza**

Antiviral therapy (e.g., oseltamivir [Tamiflu]) is recommended for patients with suspected or confirmed influenza who are at increased risk of complications, including:

- Adults 65 years of age or older
- Immunocompromised individuals

Oseltamivir is most effective when started within **48 hours of symptom onset**. Laboratory testing is not required prior to initiating antiviral therapy during influenza season.

For more information, please refer to [clinical guidance from Ontario Health](#).

**For more information, please contact:**

Name/Title: April Pollington, Manager, Infectious Diseases  
Email: [April.Pollington@wdgpublichealth.ca](mailto:April.Pollington@wdgpublichealth.ca)  
Website: [www.wdgpublichealth.ca](http://www.wdgpublichealth.ca)