Public Health Ontario Laboratory (PHOL) has updated its recommendations regarding specimen collection for COVID-19. Outpatients who require testing should have a single specimen collected (NPS preferred). In-patients who require testing should continue to have two or more specimens submitted.

**PHOL Specimen Collection Recommendations**

For patients not admitted to hospital (including those in ER):

| **A single upper respiratory tract specimen will be accepted for COVID-19 testing.** Upper respiratory tract specimens include a nasopharyngeal swab (NPS) OR viral throat swab collected in universal transport medium. NPS is preferred over a viral throat swab – information available to date suggests that a NPS has higher sensitivity than a throat swab for COVID-19 detection. |

For in-patients:

For in-patients, it is recommended to collect a minimum of two specimens, from two different sites:

- **Upper respiratory tract:** submit both a nasopharyngeal swab (NPS) **AND** viral throat swab collected in universal transport medium.
- **Lower respiratory tract specimens:** submit when possible.
- **Sputum:** collect if patient has a productive cough. Do not induce.

Serology for COVID-19 is not available.

For patients who require STAT testing, where results are required to make timely patient care decisions in urgent or emergency circumstances:

- **STAT samples must be shipped separately from routine specimens to the shipping and receiving dock at 661 University, Toronto Ontario.** For delivery instructions please see the Public Health Ontario website.
- **STAT samples must be placed in a clearly marked package indicating ‘STAT’ and handled in accordance with the Canadian Biosafety Standards and shipped in accordance with the Transportation of Dangerous Goods Regulations.**
- **Failure to ship separately will delay testing, primarily due to delays in transportation, and will be processed as a routine sample.**

The most recent guidance about COVID-19 testing, including the COVID-19 Test Requisition and additional information about specimen collection are available on the Public Health Ontario website. If you are planning to test your patient for COVID-19, please notify WDGPH as soon as possible.
Health care providers can speak with a Public Health Nurse about COVID-19 by calling WDGPH’s Coronavirus Call Centre at 1-800-265-7293 ext. 7006 Monday - Friday 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.; after hours 1-877-884-8653

References


For more information, refer to contact or website:
Name/Title: WDG Public Health, Coronavirus Call Centre
Contact: 519-822-2715 or 1-800-265-7293 ext. 7006; after hours 1-877-884-8653
wdgpublichealth.ca/hcpcoronavirus