
SUBJECT: COVID-19 Testing in Primary Care Offices
Date: October 2, 2020
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To: Primary Care Providers
From: Dr. Nicola Mercer, Medical Officer of Health and CEO

Background

With the increased demand for COVID-19 testing, some primary care providers in Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph have inquired about the feasibility of providing in-office testing for their patients. The Ministry of Health supports testing in the primary care setting if the provider is able to follow droplet and contact precautions and can ensure coordination of specimen delivery to a laboratory providing COVID-19 testing^{1,2}. Please find information below if you are interested in asymptomatic or symptomatic swabbing in your office.

Who to Test?

The most recent provincial testing guidance (v. 8.0), provides updated recommendations regarding who should be tested. Priorities for testing include:

- Any person presenting with at least one sign or symptom of COVID-19.
- Contacts of confirmed COVID-19 cases, as recommended by WDGPH.
- Individuals linked to COVID-19 outbreaks, as recommended by WDGPH.
- Other individuals for whom testing is recommended based on provincial direction.

Low-risk, asymptomatic individuals should not be considered for testing.

The most up-to-date provincial testing guidance and reference document for symptoms can be found on the Ministry of Health's Guidance for the Health Sector website.

Ordering swabs in Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph

To order COVID-19 swab kits please use the Ontario Health- West Region Swab [Order Form](https://bit.ly/2G4I5rN) at <https://bit.ly/2G4I5rN>. This form is for all facilities in our geography, including those in Dufferin County. To submit a request on behalf of a primary care practice, you will need to select "other" in both the "organization name" and "sector of care" fields. Once the order is submitted, supply chain staff will review and prepare an order meeting your anticipated needs and deliver your swabs directly to your facility within approximately 72 hours.

Specimen Collection

Nasopharyngeal (NP) swab collection is not considered an aerosol-generating procedure and therefore can be performed using Droplet and Contact precautions (i.e., gloves, isolation gown, surgical/procedure mask, and eye protection).¹

Specimens must be sealed in a biohazard bag. The fully completed COVID-19 virus [test requisition](https://bit.ly/330o5i8), located at <https://bit.ly/330o5i8>, must be placed in the attached pouch, so it is not exposed to the specimen. It is recommended that the swab is pre-labelled so that it can simply be dropped into the bag without further handling once the swab is obtained.¹

Transporting specimens for testing

Specimens should be stored at 2-8°C following collection.² Specimens must be transported to a testing laboratory within 72 hours of collection. Specimens may be sent to a Public Health Ontario Laboratory (PHOL) or another suitable laboratory with COVID-19 testing capacity.

- You may use your existing couriers and routes (e.g., community laboratories like LifeLabs or Dynacare) that you use for handling all other PHOL samples. This may add 2-5 days to the turnaround time for results.
- You may also wish to confirm with your existing lab courier that the COVID-19 specimens will be able to be transported to the laboratory within the required 72-hour window to avoid sample spoilage.
- For faster turnaround times you may drop off specimens for COVID-19 testing to one of our WDGPH offices. Specimens can be received at reception between the hours of 8:30-4:30 Monday to Thursday and prior to 10:30 a.m. on Friday.
- If you drop off specimens between 12:00-1:00 p.m. in our Orangeville or Fergus offices, please call 1-800-265-7293 ext. 0 on arrival, and our reception staff will be available to assist you.

COVID-19 specimens must be transported in a cooler with an icepack. Your office staff may drop off the specimens or you may use a medical courier for transport. Please do not send specimens with clients.

The transport of laboratory specimens is regulated by the Canadian Transportation of Dangerous Goods Act and Regulations (TDG). This legislation requires packaging that will protect specimens during transport and prevent contact with the public and the environment. This is accomplished by using the following 3-part packaging system:

1. A primary leak-proof container (specimen collection container).
2. A secondary leak-proof container (resealable plastic bag) to contain any leakage in the event of damage.
3. A rigid outer packaging (specimen transport box) to protect specimens from damage if package is dropped.

What will happen if a test result comes back positive?

If you and staff have used droplet and contact precautions and have instituted other public health measures in your office (mandatory masks, limiting people and physical distancing in the waiting room) then you are not considered contacts of the case. All physicians and healthcare workers need to continually self monitor due to the nature of our work.

For more information

Visit www.wdgpublichealth.ca

Ministry of Health- COVID-19 Guidance: Primary Care Providers in a Community Setting
http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/docs/2019_primary_care_guidance.pdf

Public Health Ontario- COVID-19 PCR Collection Kits and Instructions
<https://www.publichealthontario.ca/en/laboratory-services/covid-19-pcr-collection-kits>

References

1. Ministry of Health. COVID-19 Guidance: Primary Care Providers in a Community Setting- Version 6. 04-Sep-20. Available from:
http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/docs/2019_primary_care_guidance.pdf
2. Public Health Ontario. Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)- PCR. Last updated 16-Sep-20. Available from: <https://www.publichealthontario.ca/en/laboratory-services/test-information-index/covid-19>

For more information, refer to contact or website:

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If you would like to access this document online so you can use the links provided go to [wdgpublichealth.ca/For Healthcare Providers/Physician Advisories During COVID-19](http://wdgpublichealth.ca/For_Healthcare_Providers/Physician_Advisories_During_COVID-19).