

Updated COVID-19 Testing Guidelines

Guidelines for COVID-19 testing in BC are updated based on the changing epidemiology, testing capacity, and our evolving understanding of test sensitivity in clinical settings.

At this time it is critical to ensure timely identification of new infections and their contacts to prevent community spread of COVID-19.

Guidance for COVID-19 Testing by Nucleic Acid Tests (NATs)

- 1. Test all individuals with new respiratory or systemic symptoms compatible with COVID-19, however mild.** Symptoms may include fever, chills, cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, odynophagia, rhinorrhea, nasal congestion, loss of sense of smell, headache, muscle aches, fatigue, or loss of appetite.
- 2. Individuals in the following groups should be prioritized for testing:**
 - Residents and staff of long term care facilities
 - Individuals requiring admission to hospital or likely to be admitted, such as pregnant individuals near term, patients on hemodialysis, or cancer patients receiving radiation or chemotherapy
 - Health care workers
 - Individuals with a higher probability of being infected with COVID-19 such as contacts of a known case of COVID-19 and travellers just returned to Canada
 - Residents of remote, isolated, or Indigenous communities
 - People living in congregate settings such as work-camps, correctional facilities, shelters, group homes, assisted living and seniors' residences
 - People who are homeless or have unstable housing
 - Essential service providers, such as first responders
- 3. Health care providers can order a COVID-19 test for any patient based on their clinical judgment.**
- 4. COVID-19 testing is not recommended for individuals without symptoms.**
- 5. The Medical Health Officer may recommend testing for others,** such as those who are part of an investigation of a cluster or outbreak.

** Please do not refuse testing for patients sent in by Public Health regardless of their symptom profile.*

You can reach a Medical Health Officer at 604.675.3900 Toll free at 1.855.675.3900
For public health emergencies after hours contact the Medical Health Officer on call at 604.527.4893

Vancouver Coastal Health Medical Health Officers

Chief Medical Health Officer: Dr. Patricia Daly

Vancouver: Dr. John Harding, Dr. Althea Hayden, Dr. James Lu, Dr. Mark Lysyshyn, Dr. Michael Schwandt 604.675.3900

Richmond: Dr. Meena Dawar 604.233.3170 | North Shore: Dr. Mark Lysyshyn 604.983.6701 | Coastal Rural: Dr. Geoff McKee 604.983.6701

To receive Physicians' Updates by email please contact us at: <mailto:VCHPhysiciansUpdate@vch.ca>

Guidance on Specimen Collection and Labeling

Specimen Collection

Collect a **Nasopharyngeal (NP) Swab** using the procedure described by the New England Journal of Medicine (Collection of Nasopharyngeal Specimens with the Swab Technique): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DVJNWefmHJE>

Use the swab/collection device provided by your institution. The most common swab types used are the Copan Universal Transport Medium (UTM) System and BD™ Universal Viral Transport System.



For hospitalized patients and/or patients with evidence of lower respiratory tract disease, collect a lower respiratory tract sample (e.g., sputum, endotracheal aspirate, bronchoalveolar lavage, etc.) in a sterile screw-top container **in addition to a nasopharyngeal swab**.

Specimen Labelling

All specimens (cylindrical tube) must have an attached label with:

- Patient name
- PHN or Date of Birth (DOB)
- Specimen type (e.g., NP swab)
- Date & time of collection

Please add one of the following codes to the specimen label:

- **HCW1** – Health Care Worker – Direct Care
- **HCW2** – Health Care Worker – Non Direct Care
- **LTC** – Long Term Care Facility
- **OBK** – Outbreak
- **HOS** – Hospitalized
- **CMM** – Community or Outpatient, including urgent and primary care centres

Please submit each specimen in an individual, sealed biohazard bag. Include a paper requisition which clearly states the patient information, the ordering physician, and the test name (COVID-19 NAT).

Please refer to the BCCDC Public Health Laboratory eLab Handbook under COVID-19 test for specimen requirements.

<http://www.elabhandbook.info/phsa/>

Paper Requisitions are available here:

<http://www.bccdc.ca/resource-gallery/Documents/Guidelines%20and%20Forms/Forms/Labs/VI%20Req.pdf>

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