

COVID-19: Updated Guidance for Physicians

Key Points:

- As community transmission of COVID-19 has been confirmed in Vancouver Coastal Health, testing guidelines are being revised to focus testing on preventing transmission to vulnerable populations.
- People without symptoms *should not be tested* regardless of whether they have had contact with a confirmed case or are being admitted to hospital.
- Patients with mild respiratory symptoms *should not be tested* unless they are residents or staff of a long term care facility or they are determined by the Medical Health Officer to be part of a cluster or outbreak investigation.

Revised Testing Guidance:

Who should be tested for COVID-19?	
<p>The following groups should be tested if they develop new respiratory or gastrointestinal symptoms, however mild, including fever, cough, shortness of breath, rhinorrhea, dysphagia, vomiting or diarrhea:</p> <p><u>Residents or staff of long term care facilities</u> who have developed new-onset respiratory or gastrointestinal illness.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">OR</p> <p><u>Patients who are part of an investigation of a cluster or outbreak</u> who have developed new-onset respiratory or gastrointestinal illness (testing only as approved by the Medical Health Officer)</p>	<p>The following groups should only be tested if they present with fever ≥ 38 degrees Celsius and one of the following symptoms:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cough • Shortness of breath • Diarrhea <p><u>Health Care Workers</u> who have provided direct patient care while symptomatic without appropriate personal protective equipment to patients who are either elderly or immunocompromised</p> <p style="text-align: center;">OR</p> <p><u>Hospitalized, or likely to be hospitalized patients</u>, including pregnant women in their 3rd trimester, patients on hemodialysis, or cancer patients receiving radiation or chemotherapy</p>
<p>To prioritize testing <u>label the requisition as coming from:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hospital (label as <u>HOSP</u>) • Long-term care facility (label as <u>LTCF</u>) • Health Care Worker (label as <u>HCW</u>) <p><i>For HCW, indicate location of work, dates worked while symptomatic, and date of next shift on the requisition</i></p>	
Who should NOT be tested for COVID-19?	
<p><u>People without symptoms</u>, including contacts of confirmed COVID-19 cases and patients being admitted to hospital. Asymptomatic testing is unreliable and never recommended.</p> <p><u>Patients with mild respiratory symptoms</u> (i.e. without fever and one or more of cough, shortness of breath or diarrhea), who can be managed at home. This includes returning travellers with an onset of illness within 14 days of return to Canada and Health Care Workers. <i>Please give these individuals the attached patient handout on self-isolation.</i></p>	

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. 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

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Please advise patients, with or without a history of travel, who have mild respiratory symptoms that can be managed at home, to self-isolate at home for 10 days after the initial onset of their symptoms.

After 10 days, if their temperature is normal and they feel well, they can return to their routine activities. Coughing may persist for several weeks, so a cough alone does not mean they need to continue to self-isolate beyond 10 days. On day 10, if patients continue to have symptoms other than a cough, advise them to continue self-isolating until symptoms have resolved. Advise patients to seek medical care if symptoms worsen or do not resolve. These recommendations also apply to Health Care Workers.

What about household contacts of a confirmed or clinical COVID-19 case who is self-isolating?

People who live in the same household as a confirmed or clinical COVID-19 case who is self-isolating are at higher risk of developing COVID-19. We are asking household contacts of these cases to **self-isolate** at home for 14 days (the full length of the incubation period). As much as possible, patients should be advised to distance themselves from their household contacts (e.g. stay in separate rooms, sleep in separate beds and use separate bathrooms, if possible).

If household contacts develop mild symptoms that can be managed at home, they are asked to continue self-isolating at home for 10 days after their initial symptom onset. Advise patients to seek medical care if respiratory symptoms worsen.

For Health Care Workers who are household contacts of a confirmed or clinical COVID-19 case, they are permitted to continue to work so long as they remain asymptomatic and use appropriate PPE at all times. Note that individual departments may impose site-specific policies.

For all patients tested:

- Offer them a surgical mask and place them in a separate room.
- Please collect a **nasopharyngeal swab**. Use either the routine Copan NP swabs or the skin/mucosal swabs for HSV/VZV viral testing (the containers have a pink liquid and a red or blue cap – see photos below).
- When obtaining a swab, ensure that you wear, at a minimum, a surgical mask and eye protection.
- If results are positive, VCH Public Health will be notified immediately and will follow up directly with the patient and any contacts, as appropriate.



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Information for patients with mild illness who have been advised to self-isolate at home

Your doctor has determined that you can safely be cared for at home because you have mild symptoms. Self-isolating at home is the best way to prevent the spread of contagious respiratory illnesses including novel coronavirus. **We recommend that you self-isolate at home for at least 10 days from the time that your symptoms started.** After 10 days, if all your symptoms have resolved, aside from a cough, you can stop self-isolating. If you still have symptoms, other than a cough, at 10 days, you should stay at home until these symptoms resolve and seek medical care if they do not. If at any time, you experience worsening symptoms and increased difficulty of breathing, do not hesitate to seek urgent medical care.

Most people do NOT require coronavirus testing. Since most people only experience mild illness, testing is not recommended as it does not change how you should manage your illness by self-isolating at home.

If you were tested, your results will be available within the next 2-3 days. You may call the BC Centre for Disease Control Results Hotline for your test results at 1-833-707-2792 (Monday to Friday, 8:30am to 4:30pm)

Instructions for self-isolation:

- 1) **Stay home while you are sick** – Just as when you have the flu, you should stay home when you are sick. Do not go to work, or school. Cancel non-urgent appointments. However, you can still leave home for essential purchases, such as getting groceries. If you do go out while you are still sick, it is best if you wear a mask (see point #2 below). Your doctor may provide you with a note excusing you from work or school.
- 2) **Wear a face mask** – Wear a face mask when you are in the same room with other people and when you visit a health care facility. If your mask gets wet or dirty, change it. Please note: A face mask refers to a surgical/procedure mask. N95 respirator masks for airborne disease are not required.
- 3) **Separate yourself from other people in your home** – Stay and sleep in a well-ventilated room separate from other people. Use a separate bathroom if available. Use a face mask in shared spaces. Household members should stay in another home or place of residence if possible. Restrict visitors. However, it is ok to have friends/family drop off food or you can use delivery/pick up services for errands such as grocery shopping.
- 4) **Do not prepare food for others in your household**
- 5) **Avoid sharing household items** - Do not share dishes, cups, eating utensils, towels, bedding, or other items with people in your home. After using these items, wash them thoroughly with soap and water.
- 6) **Cover your coughs and sneezes** – Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough/sneeze, or cough/sneeze into your sleeve instead of your hand. Throw used tissues into a lined trash can in your room before disposal with other household waste. Immediately wash your hands.
- 7) **Wash your hands** – Wash your hands often and thoroughly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Use disposable paper towels when possible. For more information on handwashing see <https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthlinkbc-files/hand-washing>. If soap and water are not available, use alcohol-based sanitizer, however, always wash your hands with soap and water after using the toilet. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- 8) **Flush toilet with the lid down** – the virus may also be present in stool.
- 9) **Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces** – Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces (e.g. counters, tabletops, doorknobs, bathroom fixtures, toilets, phones, keyboards, tablets, and bedside tables) once per day with regular household disinfectant or a solution containing 1 part bleach to 9 parts water.
- 10) **Notify health care facilities before you visit** – Call ahead before visiting a health care facility, and advise them that you have or are being tested for novel coronavirus. Also be sure to inform health care providers when you arrive. This will help health care facilities to take steps to keep other people from becoming infected.
- 11) **Monitor your symptoms** – Seek medical attention if you have trouble breathing, are unable to tolerate fluids, or if your illness is worsening. Notify health care facilities and health care providers (e.g. emergency departments, ambulance paramedics, doctor's offices) before you visit.