

**FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS  
STAFF, STUDENT AND VOLUNTEER COVID-19 TESTING IN LONG-TERM CARE (LTC)  
HOMES**

**Effective:** November 23, 2020

**Table of Contents**

<b>COVID-19 TESTING REQUIREMENTS</b> .....	<b>3</b>
Q1. Who must be tested for COVID-19?	3
Q2. Who is considered staff?	3
Q3. How often must staff, students and volunteers be tested?	3
Q4. If a staff, student or volunteer has already received a negative test result for COVID-19, do they need to be retested?	4
Q5. If an individual previously tested positive for COVID-19, should they be tested again?	4
Q6. What is the effective date of the Minister's Directive <i>COVID-19: Long-Term Care Home Surveillance Testing and Access to Homes</i> ?	5
<b>SWABS AND TESTING KITS</b> .....	<b>5</b>
Q7. Where can LTC homes get swab testing kits for on-site testing?	5
Q8. How will LTC homes receive swabs for each round of testing?	5
Q9. How do we get personal protective equipment (PPE) to protect those doing the swabbing?	5
<b>REQUISITION</b> .....	<b>5</b>
Q10. Where can LTC homes get the lab requisition for testing?	5
Q11. Who should be identified as the ordering clinician on the requisition?	6
Q12. How will surveillance numbers (i.e., investigation [INV] numbers) be assigned for each LTC home?	6
<b>CONDUCTING THE TEST</b> .....	<b>6</b>
Q13. Where can staff, students and volunteers get tested?	6
Q14. Do staff, students and volunteers need to provide consent every time they are tested?	7
Q15. What happens if staff, students or volunteers refuse to be tested?	7
Q16. Can a LTC home determine their own testing dates, or will these dates be assigned from Ontario Health?	7
Q17. How will on-site testing be implemented for LTC homes in active outbreak?	7

TEST RESULTS .....	7
Q18. How are positive test results conveyed and managed?	7
Q19. How can the ordering clinician ensure reports are received as soon as results are available?	8
Q20. How can LTC homes get test results for their staff, students and volunteers?	8
DATA AND REPORTING.....	9
Q21. Do LTC homes need to collect or disclose any statistical information on staff, student and volunteer testing?	9
Q22. Are there any other reporting requirements related to positive test results?	9
CONTACTS FOR MORE INFORMATION.....	11
Surveillance, On-Site Testing, PPE	11
Swab Test Kits	11
Lab Test Results	11
For any additional information or questions on testing	11
ROUTING AND TRANSPORTATION OF SPECIMENS FROM LTC HOMES TO THE PROVINCIAL DIAGNOSTIC LABORATORY NETWORK (LICENSED LABORATORIES).....	12
LAB ROLE & RESPONSIBILITIES.....	13
APPENDIX .....	14
Completion of the requisition form	14
Safe Specimen Handling and Transport	14

## **COVID-19 TESTING REQUIREMENTS**

### **Q1. Who must be tested for COVID-19?**

As per the Minister's Directive *COVID-19: Long-Term Care Home Surveillance Testing and Access to Homes* ("Minister's Directive") effective November 23, 2020, all staff, students and volunteers working in the home regularly be tested as per the frequency in the Directive, unless they have previously tested positive for COVID-19 (see question 5). The health and safety of individuals in long-term care homes must continue to be a top concern during the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes protecting individuals from exposure to infectious diseases at work.

The testing includes all individuals working in LTC homes who are:

- Staff as defined in the *Long-Term Care Homes Act, 2007*.
- Volunteers as defined in the *Long-Term Care Homes Act, 2007*.
- Students, meaning a person working in the long-term care home as part of a clinical placement requirement of an educational program of a college or university, that does not meet the definition of "staff" or "volunteer" under the *Long-Term Care Homes Act, 2007*.

### **Q2. Who is considered staff?**

Under the *Long-Term Care Homes Act, 2007*, "staff", in relation to a LTC home, means persons who work at the home:

- as employees of the licensee,
- pursuant to a contract or agreement with the licensee, or
- pursuant to a contract or agreement between the licensee and an employment agency or other third party.

### **Q3. How often must staff, students and volunteers be tested?**

For LTC homes located in public health unit (PHU) regions in the Green-Prevent or Yellow-Protect levels, staff, students and volunteers must be tested every two weeks, unless they have previously tested positive for COVID-19.

For LTC homes located in PHU regions in the Orange-Restrict, Red-Control or Grey-Lockdown levels, staff, students and volunteers must be tested weekly, unless they have previously tested positive for COVID-19.

For individuals who have previously tested positive for COVID-19, see question 5.

**Q4. If a staff, student or volunteer has already received a negative test result for COVID-19, do they need to be retested?**

Yes, staff, students and volunteers must be retested, unless they have previously tested positive for COVID-19 (see question 5). Ongoing testing of all staff, students and volunteers in LTC homes will help provide a safe environment in the home.

Testing is done at a point in time. Existing literature indicates that the incubation period (the time from exposure to development of symptoms) of COVID-19 ranges from 2–14 days. Retesting is necessary because the virus may not be detectable when the person was originally tested. In addition, the person may have come into contact with another person (who was symptomatic or asymptomatic) to the virus in the time after the earlier test.

**Q5. If an individual previously tested positive for COVID-19, should they be tested again?**

An individual that has previously had laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 AND was cleared by the local PHU, should generally not be re-tested for surveillance purposes due to persistent shedding. Previously cleared individuals should continue to follow public health guidance for COVID-19 prevention, including self-isolating after high risk exposures to cases.

Re-testing after clearance should generally only be done with new onset of symptoms of COVID-19, and can be considered if there is exposure to a confirmed case of COVID-19 or in an outbreak and/or at the direction of the local PHU.

**Q6. What is the effective date of the Minister's Directive COVID-19: Long-Term Care Home Surveillance Testing and Access to Homes?**

The Minister's Directive will be effective on Monday, November 23, 2020. Long-term care homes should work to implement the requirements for testing immediately and must not allow anyone into a home who has not met the requirements as of November 30, 2020.

**SWABS AND TESTING KITS**

**Q7. Where can LTC homes get swab testing kits for on-site testing?**

LTC homes may be able to obtain swab testing kits from their local/regional distribution source. If not, the kits can be obtained directly from Public Health Ontario using an online request form, available [here](#). Please note that swabs should be ordered 72 hours in advance, to ensure timely delivery.

Nasal or nasopharyngeal swabs can be ordered for testing in LTC homes. For reference, see Public Health Ontario [guidance on specimen collection kits](#).

**Q8. How will LTC homes receive swabs for each round of testing?**

LTC homes will need to acquire the necessary swabs for each round of testing from their local/regional distribution source (or from Public Health Ontario using an online request form, available [here](#)).

**Q9. How do we get personal protective equipment (PPE) to protect those doing the swabbing?**

LTC homes will use their own supply of PPE for testing purposes. Homes can connect with their Ontario Health regional contacts with any questions about PPE requirements and sourcing.

**REQUISITION**

**Q10. Where can LTC homes get the lab requisition for testing?**

The lab requisition form is available [here](#). Each LTC home should obtain their unique investigation (INV) number for staff, student and volunteer testing from their

established regional contact at Ontario Health. The LTC home can re-use this number for each round of COVID-19 testing. The unique INV number must be entered onto the requisition form.

**Q11. Who should be identified as the ordering clinician on the requisition?**

For on-site testing, each LTC home should determine their appropriate ordering clinician.

This could be, for example, a contracted occupational health physician, or a physician or nurse practitioner from an external medical team. If the LTC home cannot identify an appropriate ordering clinician for on-site testing, staff, students and volunteers should be sent to an [Assessment Centre or participating pharmacy](#). Staff, students and volunteers going to an Assessment Centre or pharmacy for testing must be provided with the assigned home-specific investigation (INV) number for use by the Assessment Centre or pharmacy.

**Q12. How will surveillance numbers (i.e., investigation [INV] numbers) be assigned for each LTC home?**

A unique investigation number (INV) for each LTC home will be provided by your established regional contact at Ontario Health. This number can be re-used for each round of COVID-19 surveillance testing at the LTC home (indefinitely).

**CONDUCTING THE TEST**

**Q13. Where can staff, students and volunteers get tested?**

If on-site testing is not feasible, LTC homes may connect with their regional contacts at Ontario Health for support, or staff, students and volunteers may be tested at a local [Assessment Centre or participating pharmacy](#). Staff, students and volunteers going to an Assessment Centre or pharmacy for testing must be provided with the assigned home-specific investigation (INV) number for use by the Assessment Centre or pharmacy.

**Q14. Do staff, students and volunteers need to provide consent every time they are tested?**

The health practitioner administering the COVID-19 test must obtain the consent of the individual in accordance with the *Health Care Consent Act, 1996*. An individual must consent to a test for COVID-19 before the test can be administered— this includes staff, students and volunteers.

**Q15. What happens if staff, students or volunteers refuse to be tested?**

The health and safety of individuals in LTC homes is a top concern during the COVID-19 pandemic. Testing results help LTC homes protect individuals in the home (e.g., staff, students, volunteers, residents,) from exposure to infectious diseases. As provided in the Minister's Directive every licensee of a LTC home must ensure that no staff, students or volunteers enter the LTC home unless the requirements contained in the Directive for testing have been met.

**Q16. Can a LTC home determine their own testing dates, or will these dates be assigned from Ontario Health?**

Testing dates can be determined by LTC homes but must comply with the required testing frequency in the Minister's Directive. Ontario Health or the Region may request information about each LTC home's planned testing dates and volumes in order to manage laboratory resources.

**Q17. How will on-site testing be implemented for LTC homes in active outbreak?**

PHUs will continue to coordinate on-site testing of LTC homes in active outbreak. The LTC home will work collaboratively with the local PHU to ensure testing is completed. This will happen as soon as possible after an outbreak has been declared.

**TEST RESULTS**

**Q18. How are positive test results conveyed and managed?**

The clinician(s) listed on the requisition form will receive the results directly and will notify the person of their positive result. The local PHU will contact the person to

conduct case and contact management (including contact tracing) and will notify the LTC home of the individual with positive results. Individuals can also access their results (positive and negative) through the [COVID-19 Test Results Website](#), if they include their (green) health card number on the requisition.

To support timely follow-up, individuals should include their primary care physician's contact information on the requisition.

**Q19. How can the ordering clinician ensure reports are received as soon as results are available?**

The ordering clinician can receive test results of samples tested at licensed labs through auto-faxing and view results in [online electronic health record viewing solutions](#) (e.g., provincial viewers or Ontario Laboratories Information System-enabled electronic medical records).

Before submitting specimens, clinicians interested in auto-faxing should contact the testing lab to complete a fax verification process (e.g., lab faxes a new submitter and the submitter faxes back to verify the fax came to the correct number and location). The clinician should also ensure their fax machines are turned on at all times and are able to receive the expected volume of lab reports (e.g., memory capacity, toner, paper). Results that cannot be faxed will be mailed to an address provided on the requisition.

If the clinician's organization currently does not have access to an online viewing solution, they may complete the [online form](#) to submit a request.

**Q20. How can LTC homes get test results for their staff, students and volunteers?**

Local PHUs will notify the LTC home of any positive results. To obtain all results (positive and negative), LTC homes must develop a process to obtain consent from staff, students and volunteers to have this information released to the home by the ordering clinician or for staff, students and volunteers to share their results directly (e.g. printout or on a mobile device showing the individual's name, test date and result).



## DATA AND REPORTING

### **Q21. Do LTC homes need to collect or disclose any statistical information on staff, student and volunteer testing?**

The Minister's Directive requires LTC homes to collect and maintain data on:

- The number of staff, students and volunteers tested.
- The number of staff, students and volunteers who refused a test.
- The dates on which staff, students and volunteers were tested (either at the home or another testing location).

LTC homes must disclose this information, upon request, to the Ministry of Long-Term Care, the local PHU and/or to Ontario Health.

In collecting, using or disclosing this information, LTC homes must continue to adhere to the requirements of the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* and the *Personal Health Information Protection Act, 2004*.

### **Q22. Are there any other reporting requirements related to positive test results?**

If the head ("superintendent") of the LTC home becomes aware of diseases of public health significance in the home, including COVID-19, they have a duty to report to the local medical officer of health under the [Health Protection and Promotion Act](#).

Health care providers and licensed laboratories have the duty to report positive results of diseases of public health significance to the Public Health Unit under the [Health Protection and Promotion Act \(HPA\)](#), *Laboratory and Specimen Collection Centre Act* (LSCCLA), respectively.

If an employer is advised that a worker has tested positive for COVID-19 due to exposure at the workplace, or that a claim has been filed with the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB), the employer is required to give notice in writing within four days to:

- The Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development.
- The workplace's joint health and safety committee or a health and safety representative.
- The worker's trade union (if applicable).

Additionally, the employer must report any instances of occupationally acquired illnesses to the WSIB within three days of receiving notification of said illness.

## CONTACTS FOR MORE INFORMATION

### Surveillance, On-Site Testing, PPE

For information about asymptomatic surveillance (such as, investigation [INV] numbers), on-site testing at the LTC home or PPE requirements and sourcing, contact your established regional contact at Ontario Health at one of the following email addresses below:

Region	Email
West	<a href="mailto:OHWestTesting@lhins.on.ca">OHWestTesting@lhins.on.ca</a>
Central	<a href="mailto:COVID19TestingCentral@lhins.on.ca">COVID19TestingCentral@lhins.on.ca</a>
Toronto	<a href="mailto:TRTestingIntake@tc.lhins.on.ca">TRTestingIntake@tc.lhins.on.ca</a>
East	<a href="mailto:CovidtestingEast@ontariohealth.ca">CovidtestingEast@ontariohealth.ca</a>
North	<a href="mailto:OHNTesting@lhins.on.ca">OHNTesting@lhins.on.ca</a>

### Swab Test Kits

To obtain swab testing kits, contact your local/regional distribution source or use the online request form, available [here](#), to obtain them directly from Public Health Ontario.

### Lab Test Results

Local PHUs will notify the LTC home of any positive results. Any individual with a green Ontario health card (photo card) seeking results of COVID-19 lab tests (including LTC home staff, students and volunteers) may visit the [COVID-19 Test Results Website](#). This web-based tool provides access to COVID-19 test results from the Ministry of Health.

### For any additional information or questions on testing

Please contact the Ministry of Long-Term Care Home Action Line/Family Support Line, at [1-866-434-0144](tel:1-866-434-0144), between 8:30 am and 7:00 pm, seven days a week.

## ROUTING AND TRANSPORTATION OF SPECIMENS FROM LTC HOMES TO THE PROVINCIAL DIAGNOSTIC LABORATORY NETWORK (LICENSED LABORATORIES)

The following points will help ensure effective processing and optimal turnaround time for surveillance testing of LTC staff, students and volunteers:

- **Asymptomatic LTC home staff, students and volunteers may get tested for COVID-19 at any Assessment Centre or participating pharmacies.** Staff, students and volunteers must bring a their LTC home's assigned investigation (INV) number. Staff, students and volunteers may bring a requisition form with this information.
- **Each region has been tagged to a laboratory that will be the primary site for LTC home staff, students and volunteer screening volumes.** In some cases, these are community labs; in this circumstance the community lab that has a relationship with the specific LTC home should be engaged to pick up and process COVID-19 tests. The LTC home should contact the community lab at least 48 hours before the planned test collection in order to make arrangements.

Ontario Health Region	Performing Lab
North	PHO Labs (Thunder Bay, Sault Ste Marie, Sudbury, Timmins) or Health Sciences North
West	PHO Labs (London, Hamilton)
Toronto	PHO Labs (Toronto)
Central	Community Labs
East	Community Labs

- **Where the LTC home is affiliated with a hospital that is part of the provincial COVID-19 diagnostics network,** and that lab has been processing COVID-19 specimens for the LTC home with the capacity to continue doing so, the LTC home should continue to route to the hospital lab.
- **The LTC home is responsible for arranging transportation to deliver specimens to the designated laboratory.** Where the LTC home is sending specimens to a Public Health Lab, they may engage their community lab to support pickup and delivery of the specimens to that lab. The LTC home should contact the community lab at least 48 hours before the planned test collection in order to make arrangements. The LTC home is responsible for the costs of specimen transportation.

- **Specimens should be sent to a COVID-19 diagnostics laboratory on the day of collection.** Specimens should not be kept on-site at the LTC home overnight, and should be stored at 2-8°C until shipping and include frozen ice packs in the container

## LAB ROLE & RESPONSIBILITIES

All laboratories in the COVID-19 diagnostics network share a common set of responsibilities and expectations related to testing under the [Laboratory and Specimen Collection Centre Licensing Act \(LSCCLA\)](#) and quality management program provided by the Institute of Quality Management in Healthcare (IQMH). Community laboratories have assembled guidance documents to support LTC homes; these outline specific processes related to their pickup process and will assist in planning.

- **Pickup of specimens:** The laboratories will leverage and where possible expand on existing routes to support the collection of specimens for COVID-19 testing. They will provide guidance on proper handling and preparation of specimens for pickup. They will not be involved in collection of samples from staff, students and volunteers.
- **Reporting to the submitter:**
  - **Positive results:** The lab will communicate positive results by fax/laboratory information system (LIS). For specimens that have an indicated investigation number (INV), the lab will also phone the submitter to notify of the first positive result from that investigation.
  - **Negative results:** The lab will communicate negative results by fax/LIS.

## APPENDIX

---

### Completion of the requisition form

- All sites must complete the Public Health Ontario requisition form for COVID-19 tests, regardless to which lab the specimen is being sent. The form can be found [here](#).
- All fields on the requisition form should be completed to ensure accurate and timely reporting of results to the submitter and PHU.
- For section 2 ('Patient Information'):
  - For staff, students and volunteers at a LTC home, please use the home address of the staff, student or volunteer.
  - It is important to note the investigation (INV) number in the appropriate field on the form so that this can be provided on the lab report and tracked by Public Health.
- The specimen collection date must be entered accurately so the lab can assess how much time has passed since the specimen was collected.

### Safe Specimen Handling and Transport

Specimens for COVID-19 testing should be handled and transported according to the [Transportation of Dangerous Goods Act and its Regulations](#). It is the responsibility of the sender to adhere to these Regulations.

Useful tips:

- Place COVID-19 specimens in sealed biohazard bags and include the requisition in the outer pouches; the requisition should not be in contact with the specimen
- Place the individual biohazard bags together in sealed large plastic bags, along with some absorbent material (e.g., paper towels)
- Place the large plastic bags into a rigid outer shipping container
- Address and label the outer shipping container with "UN3373" and "COVID-19 specimens"
- Store specimens at 2-8°C until shipping and include frozen ice packs in the container