

Ministry of Health

COVID-19 Guidance: Community Labs and Specimen Collection Centres

Version 3 – March 29, 2020

This guidance provides basic information only. It is not intended to take the place of medical advice, diagnosis or treatment.

Please check the [Ministry of Health \(MOH\) COVID-19 website](#) regularly for updates to this document, the latest case definition, FAQs, and other pertinent information.

Active and Passive Screening

1. The latest case definition for screening is available on the MOH [COVID-19 website](#).
2. All licensed community laboratories and specimen collection centres (SCCs) should undertake active and passive screening:
 - **Active screening** over the phone before scheduling appointments, when possible and upon entry to the laboratory/SCC. Clients should also use the self-assessment tool prior to scheduling appointments.
 - **Passive screening** including [signage](#) at points of entry to the laboratory, using the latest case definition for COVID-19. Similar messaging can be communicated on voicemails and websites.

Positive Screening: What to Do

Positive screening over the phone

1. A patient who screens positive over the phone should be asked to call their health care practitioner who ordered the requisition to determine the urgency to complete the test during the next 14 days. If possible, the client should rebook for when they are no longer symptomatic and/or outside the 14-day period.

2. A patient who screens positive over the phone should be advised to call:
 - Their primary care provider (for example, family doctor) for a phone or virtual assessment; or,
 - Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000 to speak with a registered nurse
3. Patients should be directed to not show up to the collection centre unannounced.

Positive screening at the community laboratory or SCC

4. Positively screened patients with non-urgent lab test requisitions should be:
 - Advised to go directly home, self-isolate, and contact:
 - Their primary care provider (for example, family doctor) for a phone or virtual assessment; or,
 - Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000 to speak with a registered nurse
5. Positively screened patients with urgent lab test requisitions should be:
 - Separated from other patients and staff so that they are at least 2 meters apart (use a separate room where available) and given a surgical/procedure mask. See Continuity of Patient Care below for more details on appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE).
 - Advised to go directly home after their lab work, self-isolate, and contact:
 - Their primary care provider (for example, family doctor) for a phone or virtual assessment; or,
 - Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000 to speak with a registered nurse
6. Patient-contact surfaces (i.e., areas within 2 meters of the patient who has screened positive) should be disinfected as soon as possible (refer to [PIDAC Routine Practices and Additional Precautions In All Health Care Settings](#) for more information about environmental cleaning).

Continuity of Patient Care

7. If the lab test the health care practitioner ordered is urgent and must be conducted as a result of other high risk health conditions, lab staff should wear PPE including gloves, isolation gowns, eye protection (goggles or face shield) and surgical/procedural masks for droplet and contact precautions when obtaining the sample or performing the test. If the laboratory/SCC does not have the ability to implement droplet and contact precautions, the patient should be

advised to call the health care provider who ordered the lab test for referral to an appropriate hospital lab setting.

Under no circumstances are collection methods that generate respiratory aerosols to be used on patients who screen positive.

Testing for COVID-19

1. Specimen collection for COVID-19 testing will take place in hospitals and authorized community labs or as otherwise arranged by local public health.

Reporting of Positive Screening

1. COVID-19 is a designated disease of public health significance (O. Reg. 135/18) and thus reportable under the *Health Protection and Promotion Act* for those that *have a duty to report*.
2. Community laboratory and SCC operators should contact their local public health unit to report a confirmed case, or probable case (including a patient who meets the case definition during screening) as described on the MOH [COVID-19 website](#).

Occupational Health & Safety

1. Community laboratories and SCCs must have written measures and procedures for worker safety, developed in consultation with the joint health and safety committee or health and safety representative including measures and procedures for infection prevention and control. Detailed guidelines for COVID-19 are available on the MOH [COVID-19 website](#).
2. N95 masks are not required for specimen collection.