



Date:
Oct. 9, 2020

Memo

Title: COVID-19 Testing and Lab Processing Update

To: Ontario Hospitals (Communications and CEOs), Ontario Hospital Association

CC: Ontario Health Regional Leads

From: Ontario Health

We are pleased to share up-to-date and accurate information about the results we have been able to achieve together and our plans going forward to support COVID-19 testing and lab processing.

In six months, together we have increased our COVID-19 testing capacity from 4,000 to well over 40,000 tests daily. This 10-fold increase in capacity has helped Ontario test more people than the rest of Canada combined – over 4 million people to date. This week for the first time, we processed over 48,000 tests in a single day. With a current rate of 3.6 tests per 100,000 population, Ontario is among the highest in the world.

The increase in the number of COVID-19 cases and outbreaks demands action and further capacity planning is under development. The government has announced additional increases in testing capacity to 50,000 tests per day in October and 68,000 tests per day by mid-November. Plans are also underway to utilize new testing methods—including point-of-care testing and antigen testing, both of which were recently approved by Health Canada. Our continued focus is to support all of you as you provide great patient care; and to support the province with as much information as possible as it grapples with the spread of COVID-19.

Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health recently updated testing guidance. Our testing approach – both support for specimen collection and lab processing - continues to evolve and is aligned with the most up-to-date testing guidance, consistent with this latest evidence-based testing guidance developed by medical and scientific experts.

In a short time, thanks to all of you, Ontario went from having no assessment centres to 158 assessment centres. Ontario Health continues to work with your assessment centres to ensure that all Ontarians who need a test can get tested. We are actively monitoring volumes: including wait times, specimen collection and lab turnaround times. These measures will help us to further refine Ontario's testing system to ensure those who need testing the most, can get their specimen collected in a timely fashion and their results quickly.

To further support this, over the past week, more of you have moved to appointment-based testing. More than 70% of assessment centres already had pre-booked appointments. Mobile testing and pop-up centres will continue to serve vulnerable populations and support testing in long-term care and other congregate care settings. In addition, more pharmacies will join the in-pharmacy testing program in the coming weeks.

As you all know, we also have a backlog of specimens to be processed, and we are doing everything possible to catch-up. To that end, we are working with the private sector, pan-provincial, and third parties to quickly maximize lab capacity.

Through the combination of applying the updated testing guidance and expanding lab capacity in the coming weeks, we will continue to reduce test turnaround times, expand specimen collection options and timeliness and strengthen Ontario's testing program.

We continue to work closely with government on all aspects of our testing and assessment strategy. Together we have come a long way. Thank you for your ongoing support and thank you to thousands of Ontarians working in our labs and the assessment centers.