



Date:
Nov. 6, 2020

Memo

Title: COVID-19 Testing and Lab Analysis Update

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

CC: Ontario Health Regional Leads

From: Ontario Health

Below is an update on the progress made on COVID-19 specimen collection and lab-analysis. Together, we are working with our partners across the province to implement the [Provincial Testing Guidance](#) to help ensure anyone needing a COVID-19 test can get one—as well as the results—in an efficient and timely manner.

The goal is rapid access to specimen collection and speedy turnaround of analyzed samples. Specifically, to identify anyone with COVID-19 in order to inform contact tracing, case management and outbreak investigations—and contain and prevent spread and protect our most vulnerable.

Some fast facts:

- The temporary backlog in COVID-19 testing and results experienced earlier this fall has stabilized
- Over the past week, 76.7% of tests across the province were completed within two days of specimen collection
- Ontario has conducted over five million tests to date, the highest rate of testing in Canada, and one of the highest in the world
- Since the new testing guidance was released on Sept. 24, we have completed more than 1.5 million tests with our partners
- Testing is available at more than 160 assessment centres provincewide
- Testing is also underway at up to 170 pharmacies
- For vulnerable populations unable to get to an assessment centre, community testing is happening via mobile units and pop-up sites and to support testing in long-term care and other congregate settings
- Test processing and analysis is happening in a network of more than 40 labs across the province

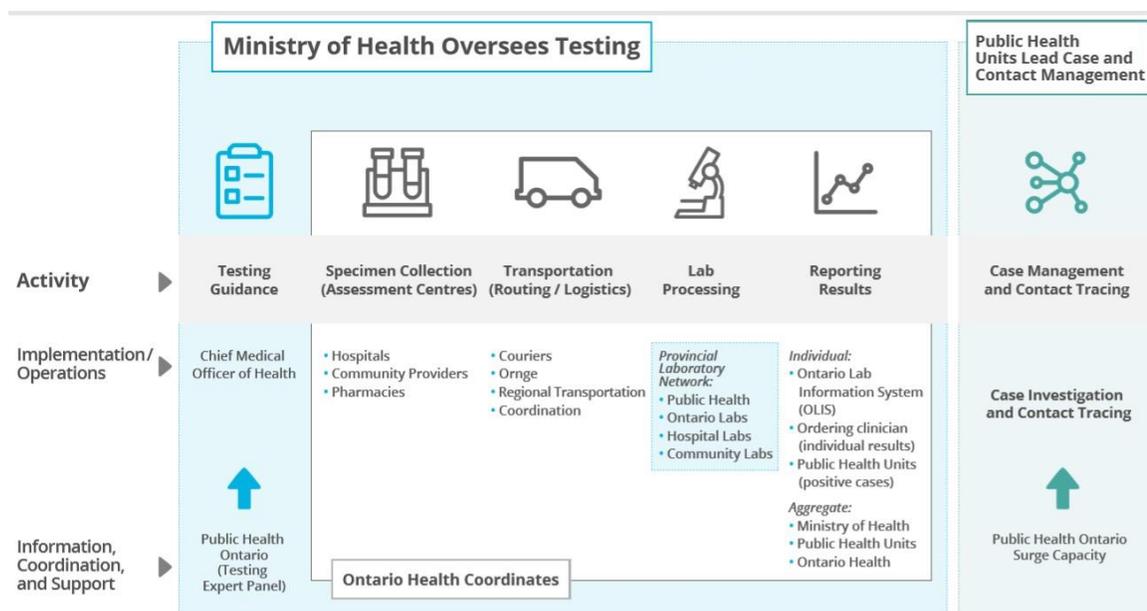
Currently, there is capacity in the provincial system for people who need a test, to be tested rapidly and for a speedy turnaround of their test results. While same-day appointments are available, most can be booked within 24 hours and approximately 80% of results can be turned around in two days.

Components of Ontario’s COVID-19 testing system

There are six parts to Ontario’s testing system. The first is the testing guidance set by the Chief Medical Officer of Health and the final part (contact tracing and case management) is overseen exclusively by local public health units.

Ontario Health, working with system partners, helps coordinate the middle parts—specimen collection, transportation (i.e., routing/logistics from collection sites to laboratories), the analysis of the tests and reporting. These components did not exist as a co-ordinated system, or at this scale, seven months ago.

We carefully align specimen collection, transportation, and lab analysis to improve turnaround times for test results to maintain or exceed our target of providing 80% of test results within two days of specimen collection. Improving turnaround times requires a consistent harmony between each of these steps. If one phase falls out of sync, turnaround times can be affected.



* Examples of Ministry of Health oversight activities include: overall testing strategy coordination, licensing, pharmacy stakeholder management

1. Testing Guidance

- Released by the Chief Medical Officer of Health with advice from Public Health Ontario and the province’s Testing Expert Panel, based on data and evidence
- Targets populations at risk—those experiencing symptoms and the most vulnerable; and to support outbreak investigations

2. Specimen Collection

- Taken at assessment centres, pharmacies and in the community with local partners
- Actively supporting at-risk and vulnerable populations. This work includes:
 - Working with community partners to provide testing in rural areas and amongst homeless populations, and to provide on-site testing where individuals cannot travel to an assessment centre

- Locating assessment centres in areas with vulnerable populations (e.g., First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities, Francophone communities and temporary foreign workers)
- Providing testing in homeless shelters and via pop-up testing locations in urban areas with low-income density and racialized communities
- Reserving some testing spots at assessment centres for individuals who are unable to book online or call for an appointment due to lack of technology, homelessness, or other sociodemographic challenges
 - A review we undertook of seven-day average volumes before the switch to by-appointment at assessment centres, and after the switch, indicated testing rates for people residing in lower-income neighbourhoods. While we saw slight decreases in testing rates across the board, the decreases were larger for people residing in higher-income neighbourhoods
 - We found the testing rates among people who reside in neighbourhoods with a higher concentration of visible minorities actually rose slightly in the days after the switch

3. Transportation / routing specimens

- Involves intricate logistics and routing of specimens from assessment centres to labs using couriers and Ornge, the province’s air ambulance
- The focus is to effectively direct specimens to labs as they are collected to ensure efficient workflows
- This is preferable to rerouting specimens if one lab is at capacity, because the rerouting will add at least a day to turnaround times
- Samples from congregate settings in outbreaks are being prioritized
- The lab network’s transportation coordination system continues to make ongoing adjustments across the province to routing and logistics to ensure timely turnarounds

4. Lab Analysis

- In seven months, COVID-19 testing capacity has increased from 4,000 to approximately 40,000 tests daily—a 10-fold increase
- An estimated 350 lab staff have been hired across the lab network since June and we continue to secure key supplies and technology
- The integrated Provincial COVID Laboratory Network of 40+ labs include:
 - Public Health Ontario labs
 - Hospital labs
 - Community labs
- Within the lab network, there is a separate process for processing tests for congregate settings in outbreak, from the time the specimen is collected, to transportation / routing, to the result being analyzed and communicated
- Also, we are working to automate the lab network which is largely a paper-based system of requisitions from the assessment centres—with pilots amongst select assessment centres underway

5. Results reporting

- Results are posted in the Ontario Lab Information System (OLIS) and available online for individuals to access confidentially
- The ordering clinician also receives individual results
- If positive, information is shared with public health units to immediately begin contact tracing and case management

- Provincial and regional aggregate reporting will soon be available on our website

6. Contact tracing and case management

- Overseen by public health units
- They continue to expand case and contact management to help track, trace and isolate new cases of COVID-19
- The province continues to work with the federal government for additional contact-tracing support

Thank you to all of our great partners on the collective effort to deliver to Ontarians rapid access to specimen collection and speedy turnaround of analyzed samples. We greatly appreciate your dedicated work and ongoing support.

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