

Key policy change – as of July 18th

COVID-19 testing updates

- Testing for COVID-19 is used primarily to guide treatment and clinical management
- A positive home rapid antigen test (RAT) is the simplest and most accessible way to confirm COVID-19 status and is sufficient for prescribing Paxlovid™ to those eligible
- Healthcare providers requiring a test themselves can continue to self-refer using the [AHS online booking tool](#).
- **Beginning July 18**, Albertans who need AHS molecular (Including PCR) testing to inform their care will [need a referral from a clinician](#)
- If molecular testing is indicated, before the patient appointment is complete, **the primary care clinic team must fax a [laboratory requisition](#)** to the central Health Link intake office at **403-943-6700**
- If the patient is unable to book an appointment with their primary care provider, or the assessment centre does not have a fax requisition, 811 will refer the patient to the Outpatient COVID-19 Treatment Program (OCTP)
- It is still the patient's responsibility to book their test via [AHS online booking tool](#)
- Only COVID-19 testing will occur at AHS swabbing sites

Managing COVID-19 symptoms in community practice

1. Patient calls clinic to report COVID-19 symptoms or ask for a PCR test

Key steps:

- A. Assess patient's [risk](#) for severe outcomes due to COVID-19 or other respiratory infection or [eligibility for treatment](#) and decide if it is necessary to:
 - a. Confirm COVID-19 status
 - b. Schedule an appointment
- B. If not proceeding with a visit or confirmation of COVID-19 status, can advise patient follows [self management advice](#)

Considerations:

- Testing for COVID-19 is used primarily to guide treatment and clinical management
- Eligible patients may call for a PCR test requisition. Use your clinical judgement to address this request, based on what is right for your patient. You may want to consider discussing the need for a PCR vs RAT, depending on patient's unique situation, and eligibility for treatment.
- If proceeding with an appointment, [the Cold Standard](#) can assist with deciding between a virtual or in person visit
- Designating members of the clinic team to handle COVID-19 calls and to triage patients helps ensure they are screened in a timely fashion for treatment eligibility

2. Proceeding with appointment to confirm COVID-19 status

Key steps:

- A. Ask patient to confirm with RAT if have not already
- B. If RAT negative, recommend repeating RAT 24 hours post initial RAT or [consider other test options](#)
- C. Determine if a molecular test is required

Considerations:

- If an in-person visit is indicated, use [PPE](#) and follow appropriate infection and prevention [protocols](#)
- Positive home RAT is simplest and most accessible way to confirm COVID-19 status and is sufficient for prescribing Paxlovid™ to those eligible
- RAT can also be administered at the clinic.

Managing COVID-19 Symptoms in Community Practice:

Summary of Viral Respiratory Illness Guidance

- Paxlovid™ treatment must begin within 5 days of symptom onset. Refer patient to [OCTP](#) if unable to meet that timeline
- Only COVID-19 testing will occur at AHS swabbing sites
- Primary care providers can access their patients' COVID-19 molecular test results in Netcare

3.a. Positive test results and meets Paxlovid™ eligibility criteria

Key steps:

- A. Assess for [exclusion criteria](#)
- B. Check for drug [interactions](#)
- C. [Prescribe](#) Paxlovid™ [if eligible](#)
- D. Send prescription directly to [pharmacy](#)
- E. Monitor patient for 10 days

Considerations

- If Paxlovid™ is excluded during steps A&B, [contact OCTP](#) for other treatment options
- The [prescribing template](#) helps pharmacies know you have assessed for exclusions and interactions

3.b. Negative test results or ineligible for treatment

Key steps:

- A. If it will impact treatment, [consider testing for influenza](#)
- B. Follow the [Cold Standard](#) for treatment decisions
- C. Recommend [self management](#) at home
- D. Check in with patient if at [high risk](#) for severe outcomes

Key resources:

- [Viral respiratory illness guidance for community providers in a COVID-19 omicron environment](#)
- Provincial Primary Care COVID-19 [Adult](#) & [pediatric](#) pathways
- [COVID-19 testing changes](#)
- [Viral respiratory testing advice for primary care providers](#)
- [COVID-19 laboratory requisition](#)
- [The Cold Standard](#)
- [Lab bulletin: COVID-19 and other respiratory virus testing changes](#)
- [Outpatient treatment for COVID-19](#)
- [AHS Paxlovid outpatient prescribing clinical resource](#)
- [IPC PPE table for community providers/clinics during COVID-19](#)
- [Patient resources for COVID-19](#)

Key contacts:

- Questions about resources: phc@ahs.ca
- Clinical questions:
 - Paxlovid™ or Remdesivir prescribing and management: Contact OCTP team via [RAAPID](#)
 - General COVID-19 clinical management: [Connect MD](#), [SpecialistLink](#), or [RAAPID](#)
- Fax number for COVID-19 test requisition: 403-943-6700