

Statement - Ontario Updates COVID-19 Testing Guidelines

September 24, 2020

TORONTO — Today, Dr. Barbara Yaffe, Associate Chief Medical Officer of Health issued the following statement outlining updated COVID-19 testing guidelines for Ontario:

"Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, Ontario has adhered to public health measures and established a strong foundation for testing and case and contact management that allowed us to rapidly identify and contain any COVID-19 outbreaks. To support this, Ontario established a provincial COVID-19 lab network with capacity for more than 40,000 daily tests.

As the trajectory of the COVID-19 pandemic has changed, the province must also adapt its approach to testing. With the upcoming flu and cold season approaching, we need to ensure Ontario's publicly-funded testing resources are available for those who need them the most, such as school children and others with symptoms of COVID-19. That's why, in consultation with health experts and Ontario's Testing Strategy Expert Panel, Dr. David Williams and I have recommended Ontario update testing guidelines to prioritize those who are at the greatest risk, while shifting away from untargeted asymptomatic testing.

Publicly-funded testing will be available and easily accessible for those who are symptomatic, have had close contact with a confirmed case, or are part of an outbreak investigation. In addition, testing will continue to be available on a targeted basis for specific asymptomatic individuals who are at greater risk due to their health condition or employment, at the direction of the Ministry of Health or the Ministry of Long-Term Care. Evolving our testing guidance in this way will support timely access to testing for those who need it.

Effective immediately, Ontarians should only seek testing at assessment centres if you are:

- Showing COVID-19 symptoms;
- Have been exposed to a confirmed case of the virus, as informed by your public health unit or exposure notification through the COVID Alert app;
- A resident or work in a setting that has a COVID-19 outbreak, as identified and informed by your local public health unit; and
- Eligible for testing as part of a targeted testing initiative directed by the Ministry of Health or the Ministry of Long-Term Care.

Starting on September 25, you can get tested for COVID-19 at select pharmacies if you are not showing symptoms and eligible for testing as part of a targeted testing initiative directed by the Ministry of Health or the Ministry of Long-Term Care.

Our best defence against COVID-19 is still to follow all public health measures like practicing physical distancing, wearing face masks and staying home when ill even with mild symptoms, so we can stop the spread.

As Ontario continues to fight the spread of COVID-19, Ontario's Testing Strategy Expert Panel and Public Health Ontario will continue to actively review testing guidelines.

Testing continues to be available at any of the province's 150 assessment centres currently open, and at participating pharmacies starting this Friday. To find the closest pharmacy or assessment centre, please visit Ontario.ca/covidtest .