

**Date:** Thursday, March 12, 2020  
**To:** All Physicians and Frontline Clinical Staff  
**From:** Medical Officers of Health, Alberta Health Services  
**Subject:** Update to COVID-19 Screening Criteria

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The COVID-19 screening criteria for testing symptomatic individuals in Alberta are being updated to reflect the current global epidemiology in alignment with guidance from the Public Health Agency of Canada.

**NEW:**

- Travellers who are returning or who have returned from Italy in the last 14 days are recommended to self-isolate and limit contact with others for 14 days since that visit. This is also the case for travellers returning from Iran or Hubei Province.
- Starting March 12, 2020, all respiratory virus samples submitted from community patients (non-emergency room patients) will be tested only for COVID-19. If influenza testing is required, contact the Virologist on-call (VOC) to discuss the need for testing. For more information: <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/wf/lab/wf-lab-bulletin-community-influenza-testing-change.pdf>.
- **Reminder:** Do not test anyone for COVID-19 if they do not have ILI symptoms.

**Screening Criteria:**

Effective immediately, people with fever and/or a cough or shortness of breath should be considered for COVID-19 testing, if, within 14 days before symptoms began, they meet any of the following criteria: <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/info/ppih/if-ppih-ncov-case-def.pdf>.

**If your patient meets these updated COVID-19 screening criteria, Zone Medical Officer of Health (MOH) approval is not required for specimen collection.**

Symptomatic individuals outside of these criteria may also be considered for testing if in the clinician's opinion there is a reason to suspect COVID-19.

Relevant patient history must be included on all requisition forms including COVID-19 exposure history, dates of travel/exposure and symptom onset date.

## Testing Instructions

- Place the patient in a separate room with contact and droplet precautions. Perform hand hygiene, don appropriate PPE and collect a nasopharyngeal swab in Universal Transport Medium. Infection control recommendations can be found here: <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/topics/Page16947.aspx>.
- COVID-19 specimens must be shipped according to Transportation of Dangerous Goods (TDG) Category B requirements. If uncertain regarding TDG B requirements, contact the ProvLab Virologist on-call in Edmonton (780-407-8921) or Calgary (403-333-4942) to arrange appropriate shipping.
- If you are unable to collect a specimen and your patient can remain isolated at home, please advise your patient to self-isolate (<https://open.alberta.ca/publications/self-isolation-information-sheet>) at home and expect a call from either a Community Paramedic or a Public Health Nurse to arrange for specimen collection. Please call Health Link at **780-735-3605 (Red Deer and North)/ 403-943-1578 (South of Red Deer)** to request specimen collection for your patient. This call does not need to be made while the patient is at the clinic.
- All patients who are being tested should be advised to self-isolate at home until they have received a phone call from Public Health with the results of their testing. Patients should be provided with the AHS information sheet for people who are under investigation for COVID-19: <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/info/ppih/if-ppih-covid-pui-letter.pdf>.
- Advise patients that if they have questions they can call Health Link at 811 for information. If urgent medical attention is required, patients should call 911 and tell the operator that they are a person under investigation for COVID-19.

If your patient is reporting close contact with a confirmed or probable case of COVID-19 and for all in-patients being tested please contact the **Zone MOH on call** for further assessment and management. Contact information can be found here: [ahs.ca/mohoncall](https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/info/ppih/if-ppih-covid-pui-letter.pdf).

### For ED/UCC/EMS/Obstetrical nurses, clerks, midwives, physicians

Find the triage algorithm here: <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/info/ppih/if-ppih-ncov-ed-ucc-triage-algorithm.pdf>

For the latest COVID-19 information go to: [ahs.ca/covid](https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/info/ppih/if-ppih-ncov-ed-ucc-triage-algorithm.pdf).