



Message from
Mauro Chies &
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COVID-19 Updates: Testing Changes and Masking Requirements

Dear staff, physicians and volunteers,

Over the summer and into the fall, Alberta can continue to expect waves of COVID-19, along with increased transmission of other respiratory viruses like influenza. In order to remain vigilant and maintain a state of preparedness, the province is taking steps to build on the foundation we have in place for dealing with other respiratory viruses.

As [announced by the Government of Alberta](#), as of July 18, Albertans who need COVID-19 testing to inform their care will be eligible for molecular (e.g., PCR) testing with a referral from a clinician. This includes:

- People with COVID-19 symptoms who may be eligible for anti-viral treatment (Paxlovid or Remdesivir).
- People with COVID-19 symptoms who are pregnant.
- People who have been referred for molecular testing as part of their medical assessment.

Healthcare workers remain eligible to self-refer for molecular testing at AHS assessment centres and swabbing sites across the province booked through the [AHS COVID-19 assessment and online booking tool](#).

How it works

Clinicians will be able to determine if there is a need for testing, and decide the best option for their patients, which may include rapid testing at home or in the clinic, in-clinic swabbing with the sample sent to the lab for molecular testing, or a referral for testing at an AHS site.

People who live or work in high-risk settings remain eligible to self-refer for molecular testing at AHS assessment centres and swabbing sites across the province booked through the [AHS COVID-19 assessment and online booking tool](#). This includes:

- Healthcare workers and workers in specific high-risk settings;
- Group home, disability support and shelter workers;
- Correctional facility staff in provincial & federal facilities;

- Individuals who provide services in a clinical care setting including hospitals, clinics, pharmacies;
- People with symptoms who live or work in isolated and remote First Nation, Inuit, and Métis communities.

Albertans who are [eligible for early treatment](#) are encouraged to contact their care provider to discuss their symptoms and testing options, even if symptoms are mild. If they have questions about anti-virals, their primary care provider can help them make the choice that is right for them. Albertans eligible for early treatment who do not have a primary care practitioner can call 1-844-343-0971 for a clinician assessment to determine if testing is needed, and how to access it.

Using the AHS COVID-19 assessment and online booking tool

The [AHS online booking tool](#) will continue to be used to book molecular COVID-19 testing for those who meet the eligibility criteria for self-referral described above. Patients referred by a clinician for testing can also book through the AHS tool, but only if their clinician has submitted a lab requisition on their behalf.

For all Albertans, rapid tests will continue to be a readily available and convenient tool for self-diagnosis and we continue to encourage Albertans to test if they have symptoms, and to stay home if they are sick.

For more information, visit alberta.ca.

Masking requirements remain in place

The continuous masking requirement remains in place in all AHS settings in order to protect our workforce and those in our care.

While masking requirements for public settings have been rescinded, patients seeking or receiving care are more vulnerable than the general population and outbreaks in these settings have a serious impact on patient outcomes and our ability to deliver services. The points below offer a few important guidelines:

- [AHS' masking directive](#) continues to apply to AHS staff, physicians, volunteers, designated family/support persons and visitors in patient care areas and in common spaces such as cafeterias and waiting areas.
- Those who work in areas with no direct contact with patients or patient items (for example, in corporate settings, health records departments, laboratory services) are required to wear a mask continuously in all areas of their workplace, unless they are at a workspace separated by at least two (2) metres, separated by a physical barrier, or working alone in an individual office.
- In buildings like Southport Tower and Seventh Street Plaza, when not interacting with patients, AHS staff may choose to wear a non-procedure mask (their own, clean cloth mask).

Thank you for your dedication and care for Albertans for these past two years, and more, for responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.

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