

COVID-19 Testing – Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

This FAQ relates to COVID-19 patient testing in Alberta Health Services (AHS) and contractor provider sites. Every effort is made to keep this FAQ current; however, for the most up-to-date information on COVID-19 in Alberta, please visit www.alberta.ca/covid19.

1. Why are we offering testing to patients in AHS and contractor provider sites?

At this time, AHS has the resources (including tests and laboratory services) to provide testing to all AHS patients (in-patient, outpatient and patients being cared for at contractor provider sites) who request a COVID-19 test. Testing this group of Albertans will provide valuable information about COVID-19 in Alberta.

2. Who can perform COVID-19 testing?

Regulated Nurses, Advanced Care Paramedics (APCs), and Allied Health professionals (as per zone processes) may perform COVID-19 testing. This includes assessing patients, obtaining informed consent and performing the testing.

If testing is by nasopharyngeal (NP) swab, the regulated professional must be authorized to perform the restricted activity (RA) of “inserting or removing instruments, devices, fingers or hands beyond the point in the nasal passages where they normally narrow” (Government Organization Act Schedule 7.1 Section 2 (1) (b) (ii)). Registered Nurses (RNs), Registered Psychiatric Nurses (RPNs), Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs), ACPs, Registered Respiratory Therapists (RRTs), Occupational Therapists (OTs), Physical Therapists (PTs) and Speech Language Pathologists (SLPs) are among the regulated professionals who are authorized to perform the RA.

It is important to understand that authorization to perform the RA does not mean all regulated professionals should perform NP swabs. **All regulated professionals are accountable to understand their scope and role; NP swabs should be performed only if they can do so competently (with knowledge, skill and judgement) and safely.** Additional training may be required over and above the standard training that staff receive prior to performing COVID-19 testing. Regulated professionals should self-identify to their Educators or Manager if they require additional training. Regulated professionals may also check with their practice leads and /or their regulatory college for further direction.

Although throat swabbing is not a RA under the Government Organization Act Schedule 7.1, regulated professionals are expected to perform the test only if they can do so competently and safely. Training is available, and if additional training is required, regulated professionals should self-identify to their Educator or Manager.

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3. Can unregulated health care providers (e.g. Health Care Aides, Personal Support Workers) perform COVID-19 testing?

As per [the Directive](#), unregulated healthcare providers cannot perform any COVID-19 testing (NP or Throat Swab). Unregulated healthcare providers cannot perform NP swabs at any time; it is a restricted activity they are not authorized to perform. Regulated health care professionals should not assign this activity to unregulated healthcare providers such as Health Care Aides and Therapy Assistants.

4. Do I need to have an authorized prescriber's order to perform the test for patients?

No, an authorized prescriber's order is not required to perform a COVID-19 test when using the [Directive](#). The [Directive](#) allows designated, regulated professionals to perform the test under the authority of the Medical Officer of Health as per the [Alberta Public Health Act \(2000\)](#). The [Alberta Public Health Act \(2000\)](#) gives the Chief Medical Officer of Health "authority to give directions to regional health authorities, medical officers of health and executive officers in the exercise of their powers and the carrying out of their responsibilities" (Section 14 (1) (d) p.15). In this same legislative act, "... the Chief Medical Officer has all the power and authority conferred on a medical officer of health or an executive officer under this Act and the regulations and may exercise that power and authority for any purpose under this Act or the regulations".

In addition to direction provided by the Medical Officer of Health pursuant to the [Communicable Diseases Act \(2019\)](#) (Section 7), AHS has provided permission for the regulated health professionals listed in the [Directive](#) to perform COVID-19 testing without obtaining an order from an authorized prescriber. The [Directive](#) is applicable to all AHS employees including contracted providers. The [Directive](#) provides instruction for performing, collecting and documenting the COVID-19 testing.

5. If an authorized prescriber is immediately available, should I collaborate with them when making a decision about COVID-19 patient testing?

Yes. If an authorized prescriber (Physician or Nurse Practitioner) is available they should continue to be involved in the decision making for ordering and performing a COVID-19 test as set out in [Appendix A of the Directive](#).

If an authorized prescriber is not immediately available to collaborate with (within a reasonable time) and the patient requests a COVID-19 test, the test may be provided if the patient meets the criteria outlined in the [Directive](#). Regulated professionals are authorized to perform this activity under the [Alberta Public Health Act \(2000\)](#), the [Medical Officer of Health](#), and the [AHS Directive](#).

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6. If my patient has symptoms of COVID-19, should I defer the decision to order and test to the medical care team (e.g. Physician or Nurse Practitioner)?

Yes, alert an authorized prescriber from the medical care team for any patient who shows symptoms of COVID-19 before performing testing.

7. I work at a private facility as a contracted provider (AHS employee providing services at a private facility or screening centre). Does the Directive apply to me?

Yes, the [Directive](#) applies to Regulated Nurses, ACPs and Allied Health professionals working at a private facility as a contracted provider.

8. Do I need to obtain consent to perform COVID-19 testing?

Expressed informed consent must be obtained from the patient or their alternate decision maker prior to performing COVID-19 testing in accordance with the [AHS Consent to Treatment/Procedure\(s\)](#) Policy Suite. As per the [AHS Consent to Treatment/Procedure\(s\)](#) Policy Suite, express informed consent can be obtained either verbally or in writing.

9. Do I need to collect and document personally identifiable information at the time of testing (on the laboratory requisition)?

Yes, document the following: First and last name as well as a phone number where the patient can be reached. Patients can consent to receive an auto-dialed message when they have a negative COVID-19 test result. **Important: Patients must consent to the use of an automated message and understand that the message will be relayed to whoever answers the phone or voicemail.**

If the result is positive, a member of the Public Health Team, or their designate, will contact the patient directly.

10. Will the test results be available in the patient health record?

The results may be available in the patient health record if it was ordered by an authorized prescriber. Results will go to the Zone Medical Officer of Health and the Zone Public Health Program who are responsible to receive and follow up on the test results.

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11. Do I advise my patient to self-isolate while they await the results of their test?

The [Directive](#) contains the following link for the most up-to-date requirements and instructions for self-isolation. Please see: [COVID-19 Public FAQ](#).