

COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions for Primary Care

This document contains supplementary information for Primary Care Networks and their member clinics on the COVID-19 response. See the FAQ for Health Workers & Staff for additional critical COVID-19 information:

<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/info/ppih/if-ppih-ncov-2019-staff-faq.pdf>

Click on any topic below to see more information.

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Billing Codes

1. **UPDATED** What billing code should I use for telephone advice during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Alberta Health announced March 23 there are new temporary billing codes that are being added to the Schedule of Medical Benefits, so that physicians are compensated for providing virtual care. More information in this bulletin:

<https://www.alberta.ca/assets/documents/health-ahcip-bulletin-med-222.pdf>

Clinic Resources

2. **Where can I get posters for my clinic?**

This webpage allows you to quickly view and download all COVID-19 related posters. Many posters are available in multiple languages.

<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/topics/Page17000.aspx>

Communications about COVID-19 Response

3. What is the source of truth for accurate information for PCN staff and physicians?

The [ahs.ca/covid](https://www.ahs.ca/covid) page is the source of truth for healthcare providers on the COVID-19 response in Alberta. The “Information for Primary Care Providers” page has the most up-to-date supplementary information for PCNs: www.ahs.ca/covidPHC

The ACFP, AMA, CPSA and PCNs (through the COVID-19 PCN Incident Response Task Force) are all working together to direct providers to a single source of truth: [ahs.ca/covid](https://www.ahs.ca/covid)

Infection, Prevention and Control (IPC)

4. **NEW** Do I need to wear scrubs with personal protective equipment (PPE)?

In alignment with the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) recommendations, normal clothing can be worn under PPE and hair nets and scrubs are not required outside of surgical settings.

5. **UPDATED** What is the status of PPE for PCNs and non-PCN primary care clinics?

PCN member clinics: All PCNs can order PPE from AHS for their member clinics. The process is here:

<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/info/ppih/if-ppih-covid-19-ppe-distribution.pdf>

Non-PCN primary care clinics: Seven zonal PCN hubs are also distributing PPE to non PCN primary care clinics who meet criteria outlined here:

<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/info/ppih/if-ppih-covid-19-ppe-distribution-non-pcn.pdf>

PCNs should only distribute PPE to primary care groups as outlined in these memos. All other requests can go to phc@ahs.ca

6. I am out of hand sanitizer and cavi wipes and cannot get any more in. What am I supposed to use?

Soap and water may be used in replacement of hand sanitizer. Soap may be antibacterial or plain soap.

If you are unable to use cavi wipes, a diluted bleach solution of one part bleach to nine parts water may also be used if appropriate for surfaces being cleaned.

Read more in the “Interim IPC Recommendations” document:

<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/healthinfo/ipc/hi-ipc-emerging-issues-ncov.pdf>

7. Is there specific protocol regarding how to clean exam rooms and equipment and garbage disposal?

Contact/droplet precautions should be used to protect from COVID-19. Details on room cleaning and material handling are outlined here:

<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/healthinfo/ipc/hi-ipc-emerging-issues-ncov.pdf>

Recommendations include:

- Using disposable patient equipment when possible
- Cleaning/disinfection of room surfaces and equipment on a daily basis using a Canada broad spectrum virucidal
- Special handling of linen or waste is not required

8. What about locations that don't have hard walls to properly isolate symptomatic patients?

The World Health Organization (WHO) has reinforced that COVID-19 spreads by contact and droplet unless an aerosol generating medical procedure (AGMP) is being done. Therefore, as long as proper contact/droplet precautions are followed, curtained areas are sufficient. In an AHS site, Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) practitioners are the best resource for site specific questions.

9. Where can we obtain N95 respirators? If we are collecting specimens it would generate droplets, and we would be at risk of infection with simple procedural masks.

N95 respirators are only required for aerosol generating medical procedures (AGMP); nasopharyngeal swabs for COVID-19 testing are not an aerosolizing procedure.

Specimens must be collected using droplet and contact precautions which include: gown, gloves, protective eye wear/face shield (personal eye glasses are not sufficient) and a surgical/procedure mask.

10. Is there a video to demonstrate donning and doffing of PPE?

Yes, video and posters are available as follows:

Video:

https://ahamms01.https.internapcdn.net/ahamms01/Content/AHS_Website/Information_For/if-hp-ipc-donning-and-doffing.mp4

Posters:

<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/Infofor/hp/if-hp-ipc-donning-ppe-poster.pdf>

<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/Infofor/hp/if-hp-ipc-doffing-ppe-poster.pdf>

Physician Questions

11. NEW Will I be covered by the Canadian Medical Protective Association (CMPA) if I provide care outside my normal scope of practice?

The CMPA has launched a COVID-19 Hub to provide up-to-date medical-legal information, advice and support on questions that arise during the COVID-19 pandemic. See this link for answers to frequently asked questions, including questions about scope:

<https://www.cmpa-acpm.ca/en/covid19>

The CPSA also has information posted on its site about scope of practice issues.

<http://www.cpsa.ca/resources-for-physicians-during-covid-19/>

12. How can primary care providers ask questions related to their role in the COVID-19 response?

Primary care providers can email PHC@ahs.ca for COVID-19 related questions.

13. If I am a physician and have questions about my own symptoms or the need to self-isolate, who do I contact?

Health Link has set up two phone lines for physicians to call with concerns about themselves.

South of Red Deer: 587-284-5302

Red Deer and North: 780-910-0385

It is critical these phone numbers be used by physician only and not members of the general public or physician family members. During this time of increased pressure on the health system, we are using these numbers to help ensure front-line providers get the advice they need quickly.

Testing

14. NEW Who is being prioritized for COVID-19 testing?

Testing will be prioritized for the following groups:

- a. People who are hospitalized with respiratory illness
- b. Residents of Continuing Care and other similar facilities
- c. People who returned from travelling outside Canada between March 8 and March 12 (before the self-isolation protocols were in place)
- d. Healthcare workers with respiratory symptoms

More information in the COVID-19 FAQ for Health Professionals:

<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/info/ppih/if-ppih-ncov-2019-staff-faq.pdf>

15. NEW How do I get information on testing protocols, assessment centres and response?

Zone Emergency Operation Centres (ZEOCs) have now been established in each zone. Clinics should contact their PCNs for guidance on how the response is being organized in their zone. PCNs are communicating regularly with the ZEOCs.

16. UPDATED How should specimens be transported? Is there anything providers need to do differently after specimens have been collected using PPE?

COVID-19 specimens no longer need to be shipped according to Transportation of Dangerous Goods (TDG) Category B requirements. For additional concerns, contact the ProvLab Virologist on-call in Edmonton (780-407-8921) or Calgary (403-333-4942) to arrange appropriate shipping.

17. Will there be assessment centres like in H1N1 and what are expectations for primary care involvement?

Assessment Centres are being rolled out across AHS Zones. Centre operations will be based on local need, resources and the evolving situation. Staffing considerations are part of the planning. Anyone concerned about travel or symptoms should complete the online assessment tool to be triaged appropriately.

Online assessment tool:

<https://myhealth.alberta.ca/Journey/COVID-19/Pages/COVID-Self-Assessment.aspx>

18. Do I need to let an MOH or CDC know that I have sent a swab for COVID-19 testing?

There is no need to advise the MOH/CDC (Public Health) that a COVID-19 test has been ordered. Public Health is working with Alberta Precision Laboratories (APL) to closely monitor test results from across the province.

Treatment and Patient Advice

19. NEW Can ibuprofen and other non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) be used to treat patients who have tested positive for COVID-19?

Yes, AHS has not changed its position on ibuprofen to address symptoms commonly associated with respiratory illnesses, including COVID-19. This aligns with Health Canada's information update released March 20:

<https://healthycanadians.gc.ca/recall-alert-rappel-avis/hc-sc/2020/72633a-eng.php>

20. NEW What advice can I give patients about social distancing?

Alberta Health fact sheet:

<https://www.alberta.ca/assets/documents/covid-19-social-distancing-fact-sheet.pdf>

Alberta Health Services video specific to social distancing:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nzeRqDCZJUw&feature=youtu.be>

21. NEW What should I tell people who meet screening criteria and want to visit the clinic?

Albertans who meet screening criteria are advised not to visit a hospital, physician's office, lab or healthcare facility. They should take the COVID-19 self-assessment:

<https://myhealth.alberta.ca/Journey/COVID-19/Pages/COVID-Self-Assessment.aspx>

Patients should then call Health Link (811) if instructed to. Below is a recap of screening criteria:

<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/info/ppih/if-ppih-ncov-case-def.pdf>

22. NEW If a patient has ILI (influenza like illness) symptoms but does not meet screening criteria for COVID-19, what do I say to them?

If a patient has symptoms including fever, cough, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, sore throat, runny nose or nasal congestion or have been exposed to someone who has COVID-19, they MUST self-isolate for 14 days.

Patients should call 811 if their symptoms worsen or call 911 if they are seriously ill and need immediate medical attention.

23. NEW What should I do if my patient has ILI (influenza like illness) and doesn't meet the screening criteria for COVID-19, but needs to be seen for another health issue?

Once you have determined the patient doesn't need COVID-19 testing, consider if virtual care is an option. If this is not an option and your clinic has contact/droplet PPE, you can advise them to come into your office and immediately wear a mask. Patients, families and providers need to wear contact and droplet PPE. You can now proceed to complete your usual care for the appointment.

For virtual care options check out the College of Physician and Surgeons document.

http://www.cpsa.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/AP_COVID-19-Virtual-Care.pdf

24. NEW Where can I find guidance on the management of confirmed, probable case or persons under investigation of COVID-19?

You can use the Alberta Public Health Disease Management Guidelines for COVID-19 for guidance:

<https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/a86d7a85-ce89-4e1c-9ec6-d1179674988f/resource/9cfe3c52-b349-499c-832b-092ae1002b29/download/health-guidelines-coronavirus-covid-19-2020-03-17.pdf>

25. NEW I have heard media reports that COVID-19 is airborne. Is that true?

Here is a response authored by Drs. Mark Joffe and John Conly regarding the latest scientific literature on how COVID-19 is spread and what we can do to prevent transmission in healthcare settings.

<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/info/ppih/if-ppih-covid-19-response-airborne.pdf>

26. NEW Where do I find the latest self-isolation guidelines?

You can find the latest self-isolation information from Alberta Health:

<https://www.alberta.ca/self-isolation.aspx>.

27. There are long wait times for 811 and the line eventually disconnects. What do we tell people do if they can't get through?

We understand that this is frustrating for Albertans. Health Link (811) is experiencing extremely high call volumes, and staff members are doing their best to answer calls as quickly as possible. Health Link has brought on more staff to answer 811 calls and will continue to add staff as they are trained.

Albertans who do not require health assessment are encouraged to visit www.alberta.ca/covid19 for general information or to take the COVID-19 self-assessment to determine whether they need to call Health Link at 811.

28. What should I recommend to patients regarding travel?

Albertans are NOT recommended to travel outside of the country at this time.

Given the rapid global spread of COVID-19, it is no longer possible to assess health risks for the duration of the trip.

- [Public Health Agency of Canada's Travel Health Advisories](#)
- [World Health Organization's Bulletins](#) for updated travel advice

Providers may want to also advise patients to check with travel insurers and travel medical insurers before travel.

Virtual Care

29. **NEW** What resources are available to help me provide virtual care to my patients?

To assist with maintaining continuity of care with your patients, there are telephone options available to support care needs, as appropriate. The Alberta Medical Association has resources to help providers understand virtual care options:

<https://www.albertadoctors.org/leaders-partners/ehealth/virtual-care>

The CPSA has also issued advice on virtual care during the COVID-19 pandemic. The CPSA document below covers topics including what care can be provided virtually, consent, documentation, billing and resources:

http://www.cpsa.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/AP_COVID-19-Virtual-Care.pdf