COVID-19 testing changes

Information for primary care providers

As per the Government of Alberta announcement on COVID-19 testing changes, beginning July 18, a laboratory requisition from a most responsible provider will be required for patients to receive a molecular (e.g., PCR) test at an AHS assessment centre and swabbing site. Primary care providers will be able to order molecular testing from AHS assessment centres and swabbing sites for patients who meet testing criteria.

People who live or work in First Nation, Inuit and Métis communities, as well as healthcare workers (including primary care providers) and other workers in specific high-risk settings who are symptomatic and require testing can continue to self-book testing through the AHS Assessment and Testing webpage. They do not need a primary care physician referral.

Why test?
Testing for COVID-19 is used primarily to guide clinical management. Rapid Antigen Tests (RATs) are acceptable for COVID-19 diagnosis and treatment in most circumstances. For those who are not eligible, or do not require a molecular test, RATs are available at no cost. A map showing pharmacies carrying free of charge RATs can be found on the Alberta Blue Cross website. Primary care providers can also order RATs at no cost through AHS.

What is the process for molecular testing?

- **Assess**: Determine if a molecular test is required during an in-person or virtual visit.
- **Submit requisition**: If testing is indicated, before the patient appointment is complete, the primary care clinic team must fax a laboratory requisition to the central Health Link intake office at 403-943-6700. This will ensure the assessment centre receives the requisition prior to the patient testing appointment at an AHS site.
- **Booking appointment**: Clinic teams can assist patients with making the appointment through the AHS online booking tool, however, it is the patient’s responsibility to book the test.

If the patient is unable to book an appointment with their primary care provider, or the assessment centre does not have a fax requisition
811 will refer the patient to the Outpatient COVID-19 Treatment Program (OCTP) and treatment, if indicated, will be provided by an OCTP physician.

Result notification

- Primary care providers can access their patients’ COVID-19 test results in Netcare. Alberta Precision Laboratories will continue to send reports based on each provider’s indicated preference (e.g., fax, EMR, mail).
- AHS will send SMS text, autodial or telephone notifications to patients for positive and negative COVID-19 results, which can also be accessed through MyHealth records.
- Patients who receive indeterminant or invalid test results by SMS text will be contacted by phone by AHS to arrange for a repeat swab. The swabbing appointment will be booked using the laboratory requisition for the original test. Primary care providers will receive results of the second test.

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