

Questions and Answers for Patients: Publicly Funded COVID-19 PCR Testing Services in Ontario Pharmacies

February 9, 2024

This Questions and Answers document provides information to patients on the availability of publicly funded COVID-19 testing services in Ontario Pharmacies.

1. Who is eligible for a testing-related pharmacy service at a participating pharmacy?

Please refer to the latest version of the [COVID-19 Provincial Testing Guidance](#).

Eligibility includes any individual who is high-risk and being considered for antiviral treatment for COVID-19 (e.g., Paxlovid).

Please note, for digital self-collection, you must have a green and white Ontario health card in addition to meeting current eligibility criteria for publicly funded COVID-19 testing. If you are eligible for testing but do not have a green and white health care, you can still receive other testing services.

2. Where can I obtain these pharmacy services?

You can locate a participating pharmacy at: <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/assessment-centre-locations/>. Please call ahead to the pharmacy to book an appointment or to find out their procedures.

When you go to the pharmacy, a valid Ontario health card is recommended. However, an Ontario health card is not required to receive a publicly funded pharmacy service related to COVID-19 testing. Those who provide an Ontario health card (green card) will be able to access their test results online via the [ministry's access portal](#).

3. What type of services are being offered at pharmacies?

Participating pharmacies offer various testing-related services to eligible individuals, including:

- In-store specimen collection for laboratory-based polymerase chain reaction (PCR) tests
- Patient self-collection polymerase chain reaction (PCR) tests, including digital self-collection

- In-store point-of care PCR tests (also known as rapid molecular tests).

Participating pharmacies can choose which of these services are offered at their stores and not every participating pharmacy site will offer all services. Please check with your local pharmacy for more information on the type of publicly funded testing services they offer.

4. Are pharmacists prepared to collect specimens? What quality standards will be followed?

Pharmacists should be familiar with specimen collection for COVID-19 tests. There are many education and training materials available to pharmacists through Public Health Ontario and the Ontario Pharmacists Association. The Ontario College of Pharmacists has also issued a Guidance document for pharmacists to follow. All training materials and practice guidelines have been developed in accordance with the Ontario College of Pharmacists, Ontario Health, Public Health Ontario and the Ministry of Health to ensure quality and appropriateness.

COVID 19 Digital Self-Collection kits will be available for pick up at participating pharmacies.

5. What is Digital Self-Collection?

Participating pharmacies in Ontario are now provide self-collection kits that allow you to collect your sample and enter your own information online.

To use the Digital Self-Collection option you must:

- Have a phone or computer with internet access (there is QR code or URL provided in each kit)
- Be eligible for testing and hold a green and white health card
- Register online by completing all required fields of the COVID-19 test requisition
- Collect an oral/nasal specimen
- Drop off at the Pharmacy within 24 hours for submission to a provincial lab for testing
- Check results on the COVID-19 Patient Results Viewer

There are instructions inside the kit. An instructional swabbing video is also available here: <https://bit.ly/3AX9Zvy>

This Website may be used to register a COVID-19 self-test kit on your own behalf and on behalf of another individual that you have determined you are authorized to act on behalf of in accordance PHIPA (for example, where you are the parent of child entitled to consent on behalf of a child who is under the age of 16).

6. What infection prevention and control measures do pharmacies have to follow to provide these services?

Testing locations must have and follow proper infection prevention and control measures in compliance with the [provincial testing guidance](#) (PDF) to protect Ontarians against COVID-19.

The pharmacy staff will:

- require appointments for in-store specimen collection at participating pharmacies
- wear the appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE)
- organize a dedicated space to perform testing
- routinely disinfect the testing area using the highest-quality cleaning products

The pharmacy staff may also request that you wear a mask.

7. I require a negative COVID-19 test prior to travelling out of the country, where can I get tested?

Effective December 11, 2020, individuals requesting a COVID-19 test for international travel clearance are not eligible for a **publicly funded** COVID-19 test in Ontario, including related COVID-19 testing services at a participating pharmacy. You may be directed to a private testing facility such as a travel clinic.

8. What happens after I receive a publicly funded testing-related service at a pharmacy?

The pharmacist will provide details on the process, as well as answer any other questions you may have.

For in-store specimen collection and pharmacy handling of specimens collected for lab-based PCR tests, the specimen received by the pharmacy is sent to a laboratory for testing. If your test results indicate you *have* COVID-19 (i.e., a positive test result), the pharmacy will contact you to notify you of your positive test result. Your local public health unit will also follow up with you to inform you of your test result and to begin contact tracing.

If your test results indicate you *do not* have COVID-19 (i.e., a negative test result), and you presented a green Ontario health card number at the pharmacy, you will not be contacted. Patients who provided their green Ontario health card number will be able to access their test results by accessing the [online ministry portal](#).

Note that if you do not have an Ontario health card number or presented a red and white health card number, the pharmacy will contact you with your results (regardless of whether you tested positive or negative).

For in-store point-of-care testing using ID NOW™, patients who present their green health card at the time of their test will be able to obtain their test results online, through the [Ministry of Health's access portal](#). In the event of a positive result, the pharmacist

will contact you to notify you. Your local public health unit will also follow up with you to inform you of your test results. In the event of a negative result, the pharmacist will not inform you however you may be able to obtain your results online.

For all specimen collection/handling services, in the event of a canceled or rejected sample, the pharmacist will contact you to advise you that a second swab is required and will direct you to have your specimen re-collected at a pharmacy or assessment center.

9. Am I eligible to receive a COVID-19 antiviral treatment?

COVID-19 antiviral and other treatments are now available for free by prescription to people who are eligible and who are at higher risk of progressing to severe disease requiring hospitalization.

To be considered for antiviral treatment, a health care provider must assess you to determine if treatment is right for you, which includes whether or not you are at higher risk of developing severe symptoms. For more information on how to access treatment, please visit the [Ontario website](#).

10. Where can I get more information?

For more information related to COVID-19 and publicly funded pharmacy testing services and to find a participating pharmacy, visit the [Ontario website](#).