COVID-19: Testing Guidelines for British Columbia

May 11, 2020

Guidelines for COVID-19 testing in BC are updated based on the changing epidemiology, testing capacity, and our evolving understanding of test sensitivity in clinical settings. At this time, it is critical to ensure timely identification of new infections and their contacts to prevent community spread of COVID-19.

Guidance for COVID-19 Testing by Nucleic Acid Tests (NATs)

1. Test all individuals with new respiratory or systemic symptoms compatible with COVID-19, however mild. Symptoms may include fever, chills, cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, odynophagia, rhinorrhea, nasal congestion, loss of sense of smell, headache, muscle aches, fatigue, or loss of appetite.

2. Individuals in the following groups should be prioritized for testing:
   a. Residents and staff of long-term care facilities
   b. Individuals requiring admission to hospital or likely to be admitted, such as pregnant individuals near-term, patients on hemodialysis, or cancer patients receiving radiation or chemotherapy.
   c. Healthcare workers
   d. Individuals with a higher probability of being infected with COVID-19 such as contacts of a known case of COVID-19 and travellers just returned to Canada
   e. Residents of remote, isolated, or Indigenous communities
   f. People living in congregate settings such as work-camps, correctional facilities, shelters, group homes, assisted living and seniors’ residences
   g. People who are homeless or have unstable housing
   h. Essential service providers, such as first responders

3. Healthcare providers can order a COVID-19 test for any patient based on their clinical judgment.

4. COVID-19 testing is not recommended for individuals without symptoms.

5. The Medical Health Officer may recommend testing for others, such as those who are part of an investigation of a cluster or outbreak.
Guidance on Specimen Collecting and Labelling

Specimen Collection

Collect a **Nasopharyngeal (NP) Swab** using the procedure described by the *New England Journal of Medicine* (Collection of Nasopharyngeal Specimens with the Swab Technique): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DVJNWefmHJE

Use the swab/collection device provided by your institution. The following swabs are currently validated and are available for use in BC:

- Copan – Red or Blue top
- Hologic Aptima Unisex
- VWR Starplex

For hospitalized patients and/or patients with evidence of lower respiratory tract disease, collect a lower respiratory tract sample (e.g., sputum, endotracheal aspirate, bronchoalveolar lavage, etc.) in a sterile screw-top container in addition to a **nasopharyngeal swab**.

Specimen Labelling

All specimens (cylindrical tube) must have an attached label with:

- Patient name
- PHN or Date of Birth (DOB)
- Specimen type (e.g., NP swab)
- Date & time of collection

Please add one of the following codes to the specimen label:

- **HCW1** – Health Care Worker – Direct Care
- **HCW2** – Health Care Worker – Non Direct Care
- **LTC** – Long Term Care Facility
- **OBK** – Outbreaks, clusters or case contacts
- **HOS** – Hospitalized
- **CMM** – Community or Outpatient, including Urgent and Primary Care Centres
- **CGT** – People living in congregate settings such as work-camps, correctional facilities, shelters, group homes, assisted living and seniors’ residences.

Please submit each specimen in an individual, sealed biohazard bag. Include a paper requisition which clearly states the patient information, the ordering physician, and the test name (COVID-19 NAT).


Paper Requisitions are available here: http://www.bccdc.ca/resource-gallery/Documents/Guidelines%20and%20Forms/Forms/Labs/VI%20Req.pdf

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