



Date: June 5, 2020
To: All Health Care Providers
From: Alberta Precision Laboratories (APL) – Public Health Laboratory
Re: Asymptomatic screening for COVID-19

PLEASE POST OR DISTRIBUTE AS WIDELY AS APPROPRIATE

Key message:

- Asymptomatic screening for COVID-19 is available and has been implemented in multiple settings.
- When collecting a swab for COVID-19 testing in asymptomatic patients, use a throat swab collection kit if available instead of a nasopharyngeal (NP) swab.
- Rapid COVID-19 testing is not available for asymptomatic screening.
- To order COVID-19 testing on asymptomatic patients:
 - Use only the new APL – Public Health Laboratory COVID-19 requisitions for your respective zone.¹
 - For all zones except the South, the ordering physician will be your Zone Medical Officer of Health (or First Nations MOH where applicable). In the South Zone, the ED/UCC/Clinic physician at the site under whose authority the testing is being conducted will be the ordering provider.
 - DO NOT USE YOUR CLINICAL INFORMATION SYSTEM (e.g., Meditech, Sunrise Clinical Manager, Connect Care). **Continue using your CIS for testing of symptomatic patients only.**

Background:

- While most COVID-19 testing in Alberta has been performed for symptomatic patients, asymptomatic infection can occur.
- Whether asymptomatic transmission plays a significant role in driving the pandemic is not clear at this time.
- As there is a limited supply of nasopharyngeal swabs, it is recommended that throat swabs be used when available for COVID-19 testing of asymptomatic patients.

Action Required:

- Use the Zone-specific Public Health requisitions for ordering COVID-19.¹
- See the instructions for filling out these requisitions.²
- The ordering physician (i.e., Provider) should be entered as the Zone MOH for all zones except South Zone. In the South Zone, ED/UCC/Clinic physician at the site under whose authority the testing is being conducted. If an additional physician wishes to receive the result, include their information in the “Copy to” section.
- For First Nations patients, please inquire whether their place of residence is on a reserve and copy Dr. Wadieh Yacoub, First Nations and Inuit Health Branch MOH, on the lab requisition.
- For asymptomatic patients, DO NOT order the Respiratory Pathogen Panel. Only COVID-19 testing should be performed.
- Select “Asymptomatic” under reason for testing:

Reason for Testing

Investigation for COVID-19 exposure

Check ONE: Symptomatic Asymptomatic



- Under “Consent for results for negative COVID-19 to be messaged,” indicate if consent for results to be messaged/called has been obtained and the preferred phone number.
- For residents and staff of long-term care (LTC) and designated supportive living (DSL) facilities, indicate this on the requisition in the appropriate area and provide the facility name and its location code (this information is provided on the reverse side of each Zone-specific COVID-19 requisition).
- DO NOT order rapid COVID-19 testing for routine testing of asymptomatic patients as rapid test kits are reserved for symptomatic patients and/or urgent cases.
- For COVID-19 testing of asymptomatic patients, use throat swabs as per the list of acceptable swab types instead of NP swabs.³

Inquiries and feedback may be directed to:

Dr. Byron Berenger, Medical Microbiologist, Public Health Lab, byron.berenger@aplabs.ca; 587-779-5573

Dr. Nathan Zelyas, Medical Microbiologist, Public Health Lab, Nathan.Zelyas@aplabs.ca; 780-407-8921

Approved By:

Dr. Graham Tipples, Medical-Scientific Director, Public Health, APL

References:

1. Zone-specific COVID-19 requisitions:

North Zone: <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/frm-21598.pdf>

Edmonton Zone: <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/frm-21597.pdf>

Central Zone: <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/frm-21600.pdf>

Calgary Zone: <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/frm-21596.pdf>

South Zone: <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/frm-21599.pdf>

2. Zone-specific Instructions for filling out COVID-19 requisitions:

[North Zone form instructions](#)

[Edmonton Zone form instructions](#)

[Central Zone form instructions](#)

[Calgary Zone form instructions](#)

[South Zone form instructions](#)

3. APL Test Directory – Acceptable Swab Types for COVID Testing:

<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/wf/lab/wf-lab-apl-acceptable-swab-types-for-covid-testing.pdf>