

Asymptomatic Testing for COVID-19: Questions and Answers for Pharmacists

1. What is the test, how is it administered and what do the results show?

The test is a PCR based throat swab which looks for the presence of the SARS-CoV2 at the time of sampling. The test will not show whether a person has been previously exposed to COVID-19 nor if they are resistant to the virus.

2. Who can get a test done at the pharmacy?

Only patients who are asymptomatic and who have no known exposures to COVID-19 will be able to be tested at the pharmacy. Patients who display any symptoms of COVID-19 infections or who may have been exposed due to travel, or close personal contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 MUST be referred for testing at an AHS Assessment Center by calling 811.

3. How do pharmacy staff know whether a person is asymptomatic or not?

Pharmacists will use the AHS COVID-19 Assessment Tool to pre-screen patients prior to offering the COVID-19 test to an asymptomatic individual. Patients who complete the pre-screening and have **any** indicator that they may have heightened risk for COVID-19 MUST be referred to an AHS Assessment Center by calling 811.

4. What is considered close contact for screening? For instance, patients are being referred by 811 to pharmacy when they have been in the same spin class as a positive instructor.

The definition of a close contact is set by Alberta Health in the notifiable disease guidelines.

A close contact is defined as a person who provided care for the individual, including healthcare workers, family members or other caregivers, or who had other similar close physical contact with the person without consistent and appropriate use of personal protective equipment OR who lived with or otherwise had close prolonged contact (within two meters) with the person while they were infectious OR had direct contact with infectious bodily fluids of the person (e.g. was coughed or sneezed on) while not wearing recommended personal protective equipment.

All persons meeting the “close contact” definition are legally required to isolate for 14 days but may access testing or emergency medical care as required.

Close contacts of confirmed positive cases are asked to have testing through AHS via either the online tool, by calling health link (811) or by a direct referral through public health and not referred to pharmacy.

5. How will patients know which pharmacies are offering asymptomatic testing?

This information will be posted and updates weekly on the Alberta Blue Cross website which is available at <https://www.ab.bluecross.ca/news/asymptomatic-testing.php>.

In addition, the AHS Online Screening tool will link patients to a testing site locator if they screen as asymptomatic. Patients will be able to see the nearest sites which are currently offering testing within 75km in their communities.

6. Will patients be able to come into the pharmacy on a drop-in basis to be pre-screened and/or tested or will they need to call ahead for pre-screening and make an appointment for testing?

Pharmacies must use their professional judgment based on the physical layout of their store, environmental cleaning protocols in place and the patient population they serve as to the most appropriate way to pre-screen and triage asymptomatic patients for testing.

7. How do I request my Pharmacy information to be changed ?

The list of participating pharmacies is updated on a weekly basis. To update the information for your pharmacy, please complete the Pharmacy COVID-19 Program Change Request Form posted on the online pharmacy providers resources section available at <https://www.ab.bluecross.ca/providers/pharmacy-resources.php>.

8. When my pharmacy is publicly identified as an asymptomatic testing site, can it be flagged as by appointment only?

A preface to the list of testing pharmacies will indicate that patients should call ahead to pharmacy to see if there is availability of appointments, or if the pharmacy will accept walk-in patients for testing

9. How do I proceed if someone presents with symptoms of COVID-19?

Patients who display any symptoms of COVID-19 infection or those who may have been exposed due to travel, or close personal contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 MUST be referred for testing at an AHS Assessment Center by calling 811.

10. What do we do if someone is not truthful in the required pre-screen?

If there is reason to believe that the individual may be symptomatic when presenting at the pharmacy then they should immediately be referred to AHS for testing and contact tracing.

11. Can asymptomatic COVID-19 testing be performed outside of the pharmacy?

The program is designed to offer asymptomatic testing at Pharmacy locations and appropriate processes must be maintained to ensure that individuals seeking testing are screened.

12. An individual who is not my patient is requesting their COVID-19 result. How do I proceed?

Patients can be directed to enroll for MyHealth record to check their own result or be referred back to their original test site to get the result.

If a health care provider is not the authorized ordering clinician for a COVID-19 test for a patient but has an ongoing relationship with that person for clinical care, it would be appropriate for them to access and disclose the results of the test to their patient. This may include the patient's primary care clinician, another clinician as required as part of a patient's clinical assessment or a pharmacist with an ongoing clinical relationship to that patient.

Any health care provider disclosing results to a patient should be familiar with appropriate health information to provide the patient. Confidential health care information, such as COVID-19 lab results, should not be accessed or disclosed by health care providers who do not have an ongoing clinical relationship in that patient's care.

13. Someone from out of province or out of country is requesting a test. What should I do?

Out-of-province/out-of-country Individuals who inquire about asymptomatic COVID-19 testing who do not have an Alberta Personal Health Number (common examples are individuals from out-of-province, out-of-country, here for work, here for travel, etc.) must be referred to an AHS testing centre.

14. What if someone is requesting a test for travel related purposes?

Individuals requesting asymptomatic COVID-19 testing for travel related purposes and who require supporting documentation must be referred to an AHS testing centre.

15. What if someone is coming from outside of their region/zone, specifically to access testing?

The program is designed for all Albertans, if someone is traveling to a different zone in Alberta and presents for testing, testing should proceed if all other program eligibility and criteria are met, including the establishment of a professional relationship with the patient.

16. Will pharmacy staff need special Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to be able to conduct a COVID-19 throat swab test?

The Chief Medical Officer of Health has determined that although N-95 masks are not required to perform a throat swab test, pharmacists must use PPE consisting of gloves, mask, and face shield or goggles. The cost of PPE required for testing is built into the fee for performing a throat swab test.

17. Will all pharmacies be conducting asymptomatic testing?

Pharmacies are asked to participate on a voluntary basis if the pre-requisite requirements can be met, which include:

- Pharmacists must have a PRAC ID and be affiliated with a diagnostic laboratory from where test kits can be obtained and returned to for analysis.
- Pharmacists must complete the mandatory training and education requirements for conducting a throat swab test.
- Pharmacies must be able to adhere to all Infection Control Protocols (IPC) at all times in any areas where asymptomatic patients may be seen.
- Pharmacies must have an enclosed confidential area of a suitable size to perform asymptomatic testing.

18. How do pharmacists get trained to conduct throat swab tests?

The pharmacist conducting the throat swab test must ensure they are practicing within their competencies and skills at all times, which can be done through self-study, professional training programs, or other appropriate materials.

19. Where do pharmacists get throat swab kits from for testing asymptomatic individuals?

As part of the enrollment process, an initial order form for Throat Swab Kits will be completed, and pharmacies participating in the program will be shipped initial orders. Subsequent orders will be shipped to the pharmacy upon submission of another supply order form.

20. Is there any special paperwork required to order a test?

Pharmacists will need to fill out the zone specific requisition forms provided in the Throat Swab Test Kits using their own information as the practitioner ordering the test. Wherever possible, pharmacists must also include the patient's family physician's information as well to help facilitate clinical follow up if needed. If a patient does not have a family physician, AHS zones have a process in place to refer positive patients to a family physician.

21. What happens with the sample once it is collected from the asymptomatic patient?

Pharmacies will be required to deliver collected samples and accompanying test requisitions to an AHS diagnostic lab as soon as possible, no longer than 48 hours after the time of collection. Samples should be packaged for shipment as per the requirements of the laboratory site. (i.e. rigid temperature controlled container)

Delivery may be done by pharmacies themselves or by an appropriate delivery agent (i.e. courier) who can maintain the integrity of the collected samples during transit.

22. What happens if there is a sample that cannot be analyzed by the lab?

Collected throat swabs that are sent to Alberta Precision Labs (APL) for processing must be labelled according to the guidelines provided and the requisition completely filled out as per the instructions in the APL Pharmacy Information Package.

Samples will be rejected and testing not performed on the sample if it is;

- unlabeled (incomplete information on the sample label);
- mislabeled (mismatch between patient sample and information on the requisition);
- with a requisition missing key information (such as full patient name, initials are NOT accepted); or
- with a sample that has leaked due to insecure capping of the sample vial.

Pharmacists will receive a report indicating testing was not performed on samples that do not meet sample acceptance criteria and are cancelled.

Cancelled test data is collated for each pharmacist and reviewed weekly to identify patterns and areas of concern. There will be subsequent follow-up with pharmacists showing a higher than acceptable percentage of cancelled tests.

23. How will test results be made available and who is responsible for notifying the patient of the results?

Patient's will be asked to provide consent for either the AHS auto-dialler to leave an automated message or an SMS text notification system, both of which will send the results of the COVID-19 throat swab test as soon as the lab analysis is completed directly to the phone number provided.

Test results texts can be delivered anytime, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Autodialer phone calls will be delivered between 7 a.m. and 11 p.m., seven days a week.

Pharmacists will also continue to communicate all test results directly to clients as per Standards of Practice.

All test results are accessible through NETCARE. Clients may also be advised that they can quickly access their own test results by signing up for MyHealth Records online at myhealth.alberta.ca/myhealthrecords

When a pharmacist receives notification of a positive result for a person who received their test in their pharmacy, the pharmacist will communicate to the person:

- That the test result was positive;
- That their family physician will be contacting them for follow-up clinical care, and the AHS Public Health Communicable Disease Control (CDC) team will provide public health follow-up including contact tracing;
- Advice about the importance of self-isolating;
- Guidance of symptomatic monitoring and support until physician contact is established.
- The pharmacist should advise the patient who has tested positive to call the CDC if there has not been contact from them within 48 hours.

When a pharmacist receives notification of a negative result for a person who received their test in their pharmacy, the pharmacist will communicate the following to the person:

- That the test result was negative;
- That a negative test means the person does not have COVID-19 at the time of the swab collection and that this only provides a point in time result. If the test result is negative, the patient may still go on to develop COVID-19 if they have been exposed in the last 14 days, or at any time in the future. A negative test result also does not determine if a person has ever been exposed to COVID-19.

24. Aside from notifying a patient of a positive test result, what measures does a pharmacy need to take if a patient tests positive after a throat swab has been performed in a pharmacy?

A surgical/procedure mask, protective eyewear, gloves and good hand hygiene is considered sufficient PPE for asymptomatic healthcare workers working with asymptomatic patients including within the 48 hours prior to developing symptoms (if the patient later develops symptoms).

A pharmacist would NOT be considered a close contact if they were wearing a surgical/procedure mask, protective eyewear, gloves and practiced good hand hygiene i.e., sufficient PPE when they performed a throat swab on an asymptomatic patient whose test turns out to be positive.

- Patients practice physical distancing and hand hygiene as they enter the pharmacy and wait for their appt.
- Disinfection of any high touch areas (door handles) and clinical areas. (Should be part of routine practices anyway)
- Followed standard operating procedures (i.e. IPC measures as recommended by regulatory body) in the collection of the sample.

No further actions/measures are generally required (e.g. closing the pharmacy) unless there was a substantial and unusual circumstance. This will be done in conversation with local public health.

25. What happens if a positive test result comes back for a patient who was in my pharmacy, are we required to quarantine staff or other actions?

In the event that an asymptomatic individual tests positive from a sample collected in a pharmacy, there is no need for the pharmacy to take additional action provided public health requirements for conducting a throat swab sample collection are adhered to. These requirements include use of PPE, infection control protocols for environmental cleaning, and physical distancing requirements at all times in common areas of the pharmacy.

26. Will pharmacists be compensated for conducting throat swab tests for asymptomatic individuals?

Pharmacists will be remunerated through claims to Alberta Blue Cross using a new pharmacy service PIN for asymptomatic COVID-19 testing.

27. Will there be a limit to the number of asymptomatic COVID-19 tests a pharmacy can conduct per day?

The goal of the program is to test as many individuals as possible at available sites. This may be limited by the availability of swab test kits initially as production continues to increase to meet anticipated demand.

It is anticipated that the program could potentially achieve an additional 1,000+ tests per day depending on citizen response and available participating pharmacies.

28. When will asymptomatic COVID-19 testing in pharmacies end?

At this time, based on the current trends and epidemiology of COVID-19 infections in Alberta, it is anticipated that pharmacies will be asked to conduct asymptomatic testing at least until the end of calendar year 2020.

29. Initially, when should we expect to receive our test kits?

APL will deploy the first order of testing supplies to the pharmacist after successful enrolment in the program. This will take an estimated 7 to 10 business days. As shipping times may vary depending on location in the province (please anticipate three to five business days), pharmacists are reminded NOT to book appointments for testing until such time that supplies are on site and available. Failure to do so may result in an asymptomatic individual not being tested as they may not have an opportunity to book another appointment.

30. Is there an age restriction on whom a pharmacist can provide testing?

There is no age limit put in place for the program. However, for children, the limitation would be how compliant they are with keeping their mouth open while the swab is taken. If a pharmacist does not feel it is within their competence and skills to conduct a throat swab for a young child then they should be referred to AHS for testing.

31. How do I aseptically store the NP swabs that are included in the kits I have received?

Handle the swabs with clean gloves to avoid contamination of supplies. Return so they can be repurposed as per APL information booklet.

32. What if I receive kits, but then decide I do not want to continue providing testing?

Please return kits to Alberta Precision Labs as soon as possible.

33. If I have my PRAC-ID but another pharmacist in my pharmacy does not, are they able to perform the swab?

Only the pharmacist with the PRAC-ID registered with APL for the program may conduct the throat swab tests. The pharmacist enrolled in the program cannot defer the role and responsibility for testing upon another individual.

34. What is the turnaround time from reordering kits to receiving?

Processing and shipping of Throat Swab Test Kit re-orders back to the pharmacy should take on average 3 to 5 business days to be received at the pharmacy.