

Pharmacy-based Asymptomatic COVID-19 Testing Program

Introduction

As Alberta continues with Phase II of Relaunch there is an opportunity for Alberta Pharmacists to play an extended role in COVID-19 testing for asymptomatic Albertans.

Alberta has one of the highest COVID-19 testing rates in the Canada and the world. At the onset of the public health emergency, Alberta implemented an aggressive contact tracing approach and made testing available to all Albertans with COVID-19 symptoms, which include cough, fever, and shortness of breath, runny nose or sore throat.

In March 2020, the Alberta government collaborated with The Alberta Pharmacists' Association (RxA) to implement a new billing code for pharmacists to help Albertans assess and screen for COVID-19 as part of the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.

As the province moved to expand testing to include asymptomatic individuals, the RxA expressed an interest in expanding the existing assessment and referral role in COVID-19 testing to collecting PCR throat swab testing on asymptomatic individuals in pharmacies across the province.

Pharmacists are accessible, community primary care providers and are in a position to leverage existing relationships to support the pandemic response.

Program Purpose

The purpose of the pharmacy-based program is to increase testing availability (access) and capacity for asymptomatic Albertans. The program aligns with both long and short-term strategies of government:

- **Short/Medium Term Strategy:** Increase or improve Alberta's ability to determine the prevalence of COVID-19 infection across the Alberta population in order to understand the spread and presence of COVID-19 in the province. It anticipated that the program could potentially achieve an additional 1,000+ tests per day depending on citizen response and available sites. Asymptomatic testing is expected to remain in place until at least the end of the calendar year.
- **Long-term Strategy:** Create critical surge capacity by utilizing community pharmacies for asymptomatic testing should a local outbreak strain overall testing and tracing capacity in the AHS Assessment Centers. Positioning community pharmacies to assume asymptomatic testing in a seamless fashion and shifting more asymptomatic testing away from assessment centers will aid the provincial pandemic response.

Requirements

This is a voluntary program for Alberta pharmacists.

Under the authority of the Health Professions Act and utilizing their individual Practitioner Identification Numbers (PRAC ID) for ordering laboratory tests, pharmacists will be able to order COVID-19 asymptomatic testing for Albertans who meet criteria for being asymptomatic.

Participants have a professional responsibility to monitor Alberta Precision Labs (APL) bulletins for changes to testing processes.

An existing relationship with an Alberta Health Services or affiliated laboratory is an asset. It is important to highlight that for every participating pharmacist who plans to collect specimens, he/she must use their own PRAC ID and they must be registered at APL Data Integrity IT system by completing the attached intake Healthcare Provider Information Form. This registration process will ensure the transfer of results from the lab to the specimens' collector in order to avoid breaching of privacy and confidentiality of patient health information.

PRAC ID is specific to ordering laboratory tests and is in the following 9 digit format xxxx-xxxxx.

If a pharmacist has misplaced their PRAC ID, the pharmacist can contact the Practitioner Registry team within Alberta Health to receive the number. Please email Health.Pracforms@gov.ab.ca.

This typically takes about 7-10 business days to receive a response, but the team will attempt to prioritize these. Please put "PhC COVID asymptomatic testing" in the title when requesting.

Pharmacists who require registration for a new PRAC ID must submit a completed registration form to the Provider Relationship and Claims Unit at Alberta Health. (see link below)

Pharmacists are reminded, as always, to practice within their competencies and abilities. Practical experience with conducting throat swab sampling and/or self-directed learning regarding the technical and practical considerations for conducting this test are strongly encouraged. The Alberta College of Pharmacy has reviewed the program requirements to ensure that they align with the Standards of Practice for Pharmacists and Pharmacy Technicians. Pharmacists participating in this program must comply with the Standards for Laboratory and Point of Care Testing" and the supporting guidelines approved by the College.

- Relaunch Strategy
 - <https://open.alberta.ca/publications/opening-soon-albertas-relaunch-strategy>
- Provincial Testing Approach
 - <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/wf/lab/wf-lab-COVID-19-bulletin-asymptomatic-screening.pdf>
- Registering for a new PRAC ID if a pharmacist has not obtained one previously
 - <https://cfr.forms.gov.ab.ca/form/AHC11234.pdf>
- Recovering a PRAC ID for a pharmacist previously registered, send email to
 - Health.Pracforms@gov.ab.ca
- COVID 19 Guidance for Pharmacists and Pharmacy Technicians- Alberta College of Pharmacists- (comprehensive summary of approach in Alberta Pharmacies)
 - <https://abpharmacy.ca/COVID-19-guidance-pharmacists-and-pharmacy-technicians>
- Available signage including notice of available testing
 - <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/topics/Page17000.aspx>

Inbound Logistics

APL will provide test kits consisting of swabs, medium, requisition forms, labels and bags.

Test kits will be ordered using an order form which is faxed to the APL site in Edmonton. Turn-around for kits is 3-5 business days. Recommend you order a 14 day supply at a time. Kits will be delivered directly to the requesting pharmacy.

- Laboratories in Alberta
 - <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/findhealth/Service.aspx?id=4245>
- **Attachment 1** : APL Healthcare Provider Information Form
- **Attachment 2** : APL Specimen Collection Kit Order Form

Client Presentation

In order to be tested by a pharmacist, the presenting client MUST be asymptomatic.

Screening for eligibility (absence of symptoms or history of previous positive testing in the last 14 days) will be the responsibility of the pharmacist and will be guided by an assessment tool.

Pharmacists are encouraged to check NETCARE for client history of previous testing in particular to determine if client has had a positive result in the last 14 days. If there is a positive test result in the last 14 days, then the client should be referred to an AHS Assessment Center for follow-up testing by calling 811.

If a client screens as being symptomatic, or at high-risk for previous exposure to COVID-19, or works or lives at a site with a declared outbreak; as per the online assessment tool protocol, clients MUST be referred to an AHS Assessment Center for testing by calling 811, and client should be advised to self-isolate in the interim, prior to receiving advice through 811.

Pharmacists must refer the patient to the appropriate resource to receive supports in order to prevent further spread of the virus.

If a screening indicating the client is symptomatic or high-risk for previous exposure occurs in the pharmacy, then the pharmacy is to follow the hierarchy of controls, specifically with respect to environmental controls and cleaning. (see following section)

Pharmacies can determine the best approach to scheduling testing, either walk-up or by appointment, as fits best with their operational model. It is desirable to limit barriers to clients' access to testing as much as possible.

A Patient Checklist for Pharmacy Asymptomatic Testing has been developed to assist pharmacists' in ensuring all the necessary steps are followed for each patient requesting asymptomatic testing.

- Online assessment:
 - <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/topics/Page17058.aspx>
- **Attachment 3** : Patient Checklist for Pharmacy Asymptomatic Testing Program

Infection Prevention and Control

The Alberta College of Pharmacy has developed guidelines during the pandemic. These guidelines contribute to a hierarchy of controls, which must be in place during a public health response.

AHS standard operating procedure for collection of throat swab specimens recommends PPE consisting of gloves, mask, and face shield or goggles. N95 respirators are not required as throat swab collection is not an aerosol generative procedure. Gowns are not required, but may be used at the discretion of the pharmacist. Pharmacies can source and acquire appropriate PPE from a supplier(s) of their choice. The cost of PPE is covered through the program fees.

- General Applicable Guidance on infection prevention and control
 - <https://abpharmacy.ca/COVID-19-guidance-pharmacists-and-pharmacy-technicians>
- Personal Protective Equipment Approach
 - <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/info/ppih/if-ppih-COVID-19-ppe-faq.pdf>
- **Attachment 4: Throat Specimen Collection**
- Environmental Controls
 - <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/info/ppih/if-ppih-COVID-19-community-physicians-environmental-cleaning.pdf>
 - <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/healthinfo/ipc/if-hp-ipc-bpg-ready-to-use-wipes-info.pdf>
- Risk Mitigation in Workplaces
 - <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/guidance-documents/risk-informed-decision-making-workplaces-businesses-covid-19-pandemic.html>

Sample Collection

A client consent script will guide pharmacists to obtain informed consent from clients for this procedure and will outline expectations around reporting of results and next steps if a positive test result is returned.

At this step, identifying a family or primary care physician who would be responsible for clinical treatment if required in future would be valuable; however the pharmacist will be identified as the ordering practitioner on the requisition.

If a family or primary care physician is not identified, each AHS zone has a process in place through the Primary Care Network to match a client with a family physician for ongoing care in the event of a positive test.

APL has specified instructions for throat swab collection.

- Collecting Throat Swab (instruction sheet)
 - <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/info/ppih/if-ppih-COVID-19-saline-transport-medium-collection.pdf>
- **Attachment 5:** Asymptomatic Testing Pharmacy Consent Script

Outbound Logistics

Completed swabs do not require special handling. Package and store samples as per directions from APL.

Pharmacy staff will arrange for transport of samples to a lab for processing.

Under the standard for Transportation of Dangerous Good, these samples are classified as human exempt; per the ACP Guidance in respect to deliveries, the same considerations apply in this context regarding aspects of privacy, controls and security. Please see additional guidance on the transportation of specimens below.

- Laboratories in Alberta
 - <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/findhealth/Service.aspx?id=4245>
- Deliveries guidance
 - <https://abpharmacy.ca/COVID-19-guidance-pharmacists-and-pharmacy-technicians>
- Transportation of Specimens
 - <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/webapps/labservices/indexAPL.asp?id=8549&tests=&zoneid=1&details=true>
 - <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/wf/lab/wf-lab-exempt-human-specimens-packing-instructions.pdf>

Result Communication and Transfer of Care

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

For an Albertan who receives a positive test result, the AHS Communicable Disease Control (CDC) team is responsible for notification and counseling specific to isolation and contact tracing.

Ongoing medical care of a person with a positive result transitions to the person's family physician or nurse practitioner (NP). If a family physician or NP is identified on the lab requisition (preferred approach) the physician/NP will be notified of the positive result. Each zone has a primary care COVID-19 pathway in place to ensure ongoing follow-up and management of positive cases, even in the event that no family physician or NP is identified.

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.

In the unlikely event of an indeterminate result, a pharmacist will contact the client to communicate that their test result was indeterminate, advise that a second swab is required, and direct the client to call 811 to rebook a test at an AHS Assessment Center.

If a patient requests the result of a COVID-19 test that was NOT conducted at the pharmacy the

patient presents to, the patient should be referred back to the original testing site for appropriate follow-up.

- Transfer of care and pathways are discussed in the following document:
 - <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/wf/lab/wf-lab-COVID-19-bulletin-asymptomatic-screening.pdf>
- Advice for People Tested for COVID-19:
 - <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/topics/Page17034.aspx>