

## TITLE

**NOVEL CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) NASOPHARYNGEAL AND THROAT SWAB COLLECTION**SCOPE

Provincial

## DOCUMENT #

HCS-253-01

## APPROVAL AUTHORITY

Emergency Coordination Centre

## INITIAL EFFECTIVE DATE

March 11, 2020

## SPONSOR

Senior Medical Officer of Health;  
Acting Associate Chief Nursing Officer

## REVISION EFFECTIVE DATE

July 31, 2020

## PARENT DOCUMENT TITLE, TYPE AND NUMBER

Not applicable

## SCHEDULED REVIEW DATE

August 14, 2020

**NOTE:** The first appearance of terms in bold in the body of this document (except titles) are defined terms – please refer to the Definitions section.

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**OBJECTIVES**

- To allow **health care professionals** to test eligible **patients** in AHS program areas/sites (including assessment centres) for the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) using a nasopharyngeal or throat swab (e.g., ESwab) without an individualized **authorized prescriber's order** when a patient meets the criteria in Section 4 below, or where the patient has requested testing for COVID-19.
  - This action falls under the Medical Officer of Health's authority under the *Public Health Act* (Alberta) (per s.7 of the *Communicable Diseases Regulation*) and the Ministerial Order 631/2020 on the expanded health professionals' scope.

**PRINCIPLES**

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses. Some cause respiratory illness in people, ranging from mild common colds to severe illnesses. Others cause illness in animals. Rarely, animal coronaviruses can infect people, and more rarely, these can then spread from person to person through close contact. Novel coronaviruses are new strains of the virus that have not been previously identified in humans. This virus easily spreads to others through direct and indirect contact with respiratory droplets from infected persons and can be infectious to others before they develop symptoms or without having any symptoms.

AHS supports broad and readily available testing for COVID-19 of symptomatic and asymptomatic patients across all AHS programs and sites. Expanded testing facilitates testing for asymptomatic patients and is part of the overall COVID-19 screening currently underway in Alberta to help AHS understand the virus and transmission and to determine the number of infections in the community. AHS and Alberta Health will analyze the aggregate results of these tests to understand and evolve strategies as the COVID-19 response continues.

## APPLICABILITY

Compliance with this document is required by all Alberta Health Services employees, members of the medical and midwifery staffs, Students, Volunteers, and other persons acting on behalf of Alberta Health Services (including contracted service providers as necessary).

## ELEMENTS

### 1. Personnel Permitted to Perform:

- 1.1 Only health care professionals who are authorized to obtain COVID-19 swab testing and who have the knowledge, skills, and abilities to perform this testing without an authorized prescriber's order are permitted to perform this activity:
- a) Regulated Nurses;
  - b) Paramedics (Advanced Care and Primary Care); and
  - c) Allied Health professionals (as per Zone processes).

### 2. Points of Emphasis

- 2.1 Health care professionals shall complete appropriate COVID-19 screening for all patients and practice proper personal protective equipment (PPE) precautions, as appropriate. Refer to the AHS [Interim IPC Recommendations COVID-19](#).
- 2.2 Health care professionals shall refer to and follow direction on COVID-19 from the AHS [Emergency Coordination Centre](#).
- 2.3 All laboratory orders for COVID-19 swabs collected under this Directive will be submitted under the Zone Medical Officer of Health.
- a) For AHS program areas/sites, continue to engage in the collaborative interdisciplinary consultation with the authorized prescriber as per the usual process or workflow for testing decision-making at your program/site (refer to Appendix A below).
  - b) It is the responsibility of the office of the Zone Medical Officer of Health to review and follow up with COVID-19 swab results.
- 2.4 A nasopharyngeal or throat swab (e.g., ESwab in ESwab medium) should be submitted for testing. For the most up-to-date information, refer to the AHS [Laboratory Services Laboratory Bulletins](#).
- 2.5 Not all programs/sites may have the resources (e.g., staff, supplies) to test patients. In such cases, patients may be directed to complete the online COVID-19 self-assessment or to phone 811 to arrange for testing.

### 3. Informed Consent for the Testing

- 3.1 For patients meeting the testing criteria and/or requesting COVID-19 testing, prior to COVID-19 testing, the health care professional shall ensure they obtain informed consent in accordance with the AHS *Consent to Treatment/Procedure(s)* Policy Suite.
- a) If a patient declines to provide informed consent, then the swab will not be taken.
  - b) Patient care will not be affected if a patient declines testing.
    - (i) Direction regarding self-isolation requirements or recommended IPC measures should be provided, if applicable. Refer to the AHS [Novel Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) FAQs for Public](#).
  - c) Ensure up-to-date contact information and informed consent is obtained for communication of negative COVID-19 tests (e.g., release of test results via auto-dialer).

### 4. Inclusion Criteria

- 4.1 The inclusion criteria includes the following (refer to Appendix A below):
- a) Asymptomatic patients who confirm they are requesting testing for COVID-19 and understand the implication of being tested (e.g., isolation requirements with a positive result).
  - b) Symptomatic patients who meet the testing criteria, as per the AHS [Acute Care COVID-19 Expanded Testing Algorithm](#).
    - (i) Symptomatic patient testing in consultation with an authorized prescriber as per program/site workflow, if applicable.
    - (ii) Symptomatic patients in assessment centres may be tested without an individualized order from an authorized prescriber.
    - (iii) Symptomatic patients where an authorized prescriber is not readily available or the patient has been discharged.
  - c) Patients who are screened for COVID-19 testing (e.g., online assessment tool, 811) facilitated by AHS.

### 5. Exclusion Criteria

- 5.1 The exclusion criteria includes the following:
- a) Patients who decline testing for COVID-19. For isolation requirements, refer to the AHS [Novel Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) FAQs for Public](#).

- b) AHS programs/sites where active COVID-19 outbreaks are managed by the Medical Officer of Health.
  - (i) In these circumstances, health care professionals will receive guidance for COVID-19 screening and testing criteria as per the Medical Officer of Health.

## 6. Obtaining a Nasopharyngeal or Throat Swab

- 6.1 Proper technique for obtaining a nasopharyngeal or throat swab can be found in the AHS [Collection of a Nasopharyngeal and Throat Swab for Detection of Respiratory Infection](#).

## 7. Documentation

- 7.1 The health care professional shall document the following on the patient's **health record** including but not limited to:
- a) initiation of this Directive;
  - b) assessments;
  - c) informed consent from the patient was obtained for the swab;
  - d) completion of the nasopharyngeal or throat swab;
  - e) interventions and patient responses; and
  - f) instructions to self-isolate, if applicable.
- 7.2 Completion of the laboratory requisition form, as per zone processes:
- a) [North Zone \(form instructions\)](#);
  - b) [Edmonton Zone \(form instructions\)](#);
  - c) [Central Zone \(form instructions\)](#);
  - d) [Calgary Zone \(form instructions\)](#); or
  - e) [South Zone \(form instructions\)](#).

## DEFINITIONS

**Authorized prescriber** means a health care professional who is permitted by federal and provincial legislation, their regulatory college, Alberta Health Services, and practice setting (where applicable) to prescribe medications.

**Health care professional** means an individual who is a member of a regulated health discipline, as defined by the *Health Disciplines Act* (Alberta) or the *Health Professions Act* (Alberta), and who practises within scope and role.

**Health record** means the collection of all records documenting individually identifying health information in relation to a single person.

**Order** means a direction given by a regulated health care professional to carry out specific activity(-ies) as part of the diagnostic and/or therapeutic care and treatment to the benefit of a patient. An order may be written (including handwritten and/or electronic), verbal, by telephone, or facsimile.

**Patient** means all persons, inclusive of residents and clients, who receive or have requested health care or services from Alberta Health Services and its health care providers. Patient also means, where applicable: a) a co-decision-maker with the person; or b) an alternate decision-maker on behalf of the person.

## REFERENCES

- Appendix A: *When to Obtain a Swab for COVID-19 Testing*
- Alberta Health Services Governance Documents:
  - *Consent to Treatment/Procedure(s) Policy Suite (#PRR-01)*
- Alberta Health Services Resources:
  - [Acute Care COVID-19 Expanded Testing Algorithm](#)
  - [AHS Youtube Channel - ProvLab](#)
  - Alberta Health Link (811)
  - [Collection of a Nasopharyngeal and Throat Swab for Detection of Respiratory Infection](#)
  - [Interim IPC Recommendations COVID-19](#)
  - [Laboratory Services Laboratory Bulletins](#)
  - [Nasopharyngeal Specimen Collection Practises Video Series](#)
  - [Novel Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) FAQs for Public](#)
  - [Novel Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) webpage](#)
  - [Public Health Laboratory \(ProvLab\) Laboratory Services](#)
  - [Triage Screening Criteria for ED/UCC/EMS/Obstetrical Nurses, Clerks, Midwives, Physicians](#)
- Non-Alberta Health Services Documents:
  - [Lippincott Advisor](#)
  - [Lippincott Procedures](#)
  - [Ministerial Order 631/2020 \(Alberta Health\)](#)
  - *Public Health Act* (Alberta)

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APPENDIX A

When to Obtain a Swab for COVID-19 Testing

