

novel coronavirus (COVID-19)

Date: Friday, February 28, 2020
To: All Physicians and Frontline Clinical Staff
From: Medical Officers of Health, Alberta Health Services
Subject: Update to COVID-19 Screening Criteria and Specimen Collection

The COVID-19 screening criteria for testing symptomatic individuals in Alberta are being updated to reflect the current global epidemiology in alignment with guidance from the Public Health Agency of Canada.

Effective immediately, people with fever and/or a cough or shortness of breath should be considered for testing for COVID-19 if they meet any of the following criteria.

In the 14 days before illness onset, they:

- **Travelled to mainland China, Hong Kong, Italy, Iran, Singapore, Japan, or South Korea; OR**
- **Had close contact* with a confirmed or probable case of COVID-19; OR**
- **Had close contact* with a person with acute respiratory illness who travelled to the above listed countries within 14 days before their illness onset; OR**
- **Had laboratory exposure to biological material (e.g. primary clinical specimens, virus culture isolates) known to contain COVID-19 virus.**

***Close contact** includes providing care for the individual (including healthcare workers, family members or other caregivers) without consistent and appropriate use of personal protective equipment OR living with or having close prolonged contact (within 2 metres) with the person while they were infectious OR having direct contact with infectious bodily fluids of the person (e.g. was coughed or sneezed on) while not wearing recommended personal protective equipment.

If your patient meets these updated COVID-19 screening criteria, Zone Medical Officer of Health (MOH) approval is no longer required for specimen collection.

Symptomatic individuals outside of these criteria may also be considered for testing if in the clinician's opinion there is a reason to suspect COVID-19 (e.g. history of travel to other countries not listed above where cases of COVID-19 have been occurring). Relevant patient history must be included on all requisition forms including COVID-19 exposure history, dates of travel/exposure and symptom onset date.

Testing Instructions

- Place the patient in a separate room with contact and droplet precautions. Perform hand hygiene, don appropriate PPE and collect a nasopharyngeal swab in Universal Transport Medium. Infection control recommendations can be found here: <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/topics/Page16947.aspx>
- COVID-19 specimens must be shipped according to Transportation of Dangerous Goods (TDG) Category B requirements. If uncertain regarding TDG B requirements, contact the ProvLab Virologist on-call in Edmonton (780-407-8921) or Calgary (403-333-4942) to arrange appropriate shipping.
- If you are unable to collect a specimen and your patient can remain isolated at home, please advise your patient to self-isolate at home and expect a call from either a Community Paramedic or a Public Health Nurse to arrange for home collection of a specimen. Please call Health Link at **780-735-3605 (Red Deer and North)/ 403-943-1578 (South of Red Deer)** to request home collection for your patient, this call does not need to be made while the patient is at the clinic.
- All patients who are being tested should be advised to self-isolate at home until they have received a phone call from Public Health with the results of their testing. Patients should be provided with the AHS information sheet for people who are under investigation for COVID-19: <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/info/ppih/if-ppih-covid-pui-letter.pdf>
- Advise patients that if they have questions they can call Health Link at 811 for information. If urgent medical attention is required, patients should call 911 and tell the operator that they are a person under investigation for COVID-19.

If your patient is reporting close contact with a confirmed or probable case of COVID-19 and for all in-patients being tested please contact the **Zone MOH on call** for further assessment and management. Contact information can be found here: <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/info/hp/phys/if-hp-phys-clin-moh-on-call-contact-information.pdf>

There are no confirmed or probable cases of the COVID-19 in Alberta at this time. For the latest COVID-19 information go to: www.ahs.ca/covid