

October 2nd, 2020



Midwives ordering testing for COVID-19

Can I test my clients and/or their newborns for COVID-19?

Midwives can order laboratory tests for COVID-19 for their clients and infants born within their care in accordance with Reg. 682 (Appendix A) under the Laboratory and Specimen Collection Centre Licensing Act.

Midwives can provide COVID-19 testing at any point in time during the prenatal and postpartum period, provided they have the resources required to carry out testing. Testing can take place in the clinic, hospital, or in the client's home.

Who can I order a COVID-19 test for?

As of September 24th, the Ministry of Health has [updated their testing guidance](#). Pregnant people and newborns are included in their definition of 'other priority populations'. Updates to this document include information about priority populations that should receive influenza testing, testing of asymptomatic people, and guidance about facility transfers for newborns less than 48 hours of age.

- Pregnant people/birthing parents and neonates should be tested as soon as possible if they are exhibiting **any** COVID-19 symptoms (see here for the Ministry's [updated list of symptoms](#)).
 - When evaluating clients for COVID-19 symptoms, midwives should consider whether clients' symptoms are **new, worsening, or different from an individual's baseline health status**. The Ministry's updated symptoms list includes chronic or other potentially related conditions/causes for each symptom that may rule out COVID-19.
- Newborns should be tested for COVID-19 within 24 hours of birth if their birthing parent had confirmed COVID-19 at the time of delivery, regardless of symptoms.
- Midwives should not test asymptomatic clients who are considered low risk. Midwives may, however, consider testing asymptomatic clients who were recently in contact with someone with confirmed COVID-19.

All specimens that are submitted for testing will be accepted. Clients who require more information about testing can be directed to the [Ministry's COVID-19 website](#).

What type of swab is needed to test for COVID-19?

According to [Public Health Ontario](#), midwives are only required to submit a single upper respiratory tract specimen for COVID-19 testing. This specimen can be collected through any of the following:

- Nasopharyngeal swab (preferred)
- Combined oropharyngeal/throat and both anterior nostrils
- Deep nasal swab
- Anterior nostril swab (both sides)
- Throat/oropharyngeal swab
- Saliva (neat or “swish and gargle”)

Please visit [PHO's chart](#) titled *Preferred and Acceptable Specimen Types for COVID-19 Testing by Patient Characteristic* to determine when a given swab is preferred or acceptable for your client. Please also see PHO's requirements for submitted specimens (including requisition(s) required and minimum volume thresholds).

Note: Swabs should be collected in universal transport medium (UTM). However, PHO will accept other liquid transport media (except gel or solid media).

As of October 5, 2020, PHO will begin accepting saliva samples for COVID-19 testing. This sample is considered acceptable for children (including newborns) for whom other collection methods may not be tolerable.

How can I order collection kits?

Midwives must submit their orders for COVID-19 test collection kits through the [Ontario Health Digital Health Services page](#).

Note: Collection kits should be stored at 2-25°C until used.

How do I conduct a nasopharyngeal swab? (Preferred method)

Please visit PHO's webpage titled [Virus Respiratory Kit \(Nasopharyngeal\) Specimen Collection Instructions](#) for detailed, step-by-step information regarding the collection of a nasopharyngeal specimen. Midwives may also watch [this video](#) for additional visual guidance.

How do I conduct a nasopharyngeal swab on a newborn?

Although conducting a nasopharyngeal swab on a newborn involves the same process as it would with an adult, there are a few considerations to make when swabbing a newborn. Nasopharyngeal swabs are invasive and can be a [discomforting experience for newborns](#) and their parents. [This video](#) provides some guidance on how midwives can lessen this discomfort when conducting a nasopharyngeal swab.

There are presently no nasopharyngeal swabs designed specifically for newborns. If the only nasopharyngeal swabs available to midwives are too wide, they may use the available swab to collect a nasal, deep nasal or throat specimen for testing.

The Provincial Council for Maternal and Child Health’s (PCMCH) COVID-19 guidance document includes considerations for nasopharyngeal testing on a newborn (such as ensuring a newborn’s face is cleansed prior to sample collection). See [page 18](#) of this guidance document for more information.

When should I swab for alternative respiratory tract specimens?

It may not be possible to conduct a nasopharyngeal swab if, for instance, it will result in a great deal of discomfort for clients/newborns or testing supplies are limited/unavailable. If a nasopharyngeal swab is not possible for COVID-19 testing, PHO recommends a combined swab of the throat and anterior nares or a deep nasal swab. While these are currently considered the most acceptable alternatives, they have been proven to result in slightly more false-negative results. More research with larger sample sizes is still needed to confirm these findings.

PHO has summarized the performance characteristics for various respiratory specimens in this updated [evidence brief](#). When compared to nasopharyngeal swabs, the collection of the following specimens for COVID-19 testing are reported to have the following sensitivity rates:

Comparison	Sensitivity rate
Nasal or deep nasal vs nasopharyngeal	82.6% to 100% (five studies)
Throat vs nasopharyngeal	81.8% (one study)
Saliva vs nasopharyngeal	69.2% to 97.1% (three studies)
Combined throat and nares vs nasopharyngeal	91.7% (one study)

Please see PHO’s full [evidence brief](#) for more information and a full list of references.

Alternative collection kits

Due to existing shortages, PHO has compiled a list of [alternative collection kits for various respiratory specimens](#). Midwives can procure any of the collection kits listed on PHO’s website to collect a sample for COVID-19.

Additional collection kits

Midwives can submit other swab types (except cotton-tipped swabs) and other liquid transport media (except gel or solid media) to PHO laboratories for COVID-19 testing. Midwives may also order additional collection kits from the [Ontario Health Digital Health Services](#) page.

What personal protective equipment is required when testing for COVID-19?

Midwives should don droplet and contact precautions when testing for COVID-19. This includes:

- Surgical/procedure mask
- Isolation gown
- Gloves
- Eye protection (goggles or face shield)

Requisition form for COVID-19 testing

Midwives must complete all fields of the [COVID-19 Virus Test Requisition](#) form when they have completed swabbing and include with sample(s) for processing.

How do I prepare the sample(s) for transportation?

After collecting the sample, midwives should:

- Place the specimen in the biohazard bag and seal.
- Ensure that specimens are stored at 2-8°C (in the fridge).
- Ship specimen on ice packs.
- **Note:** if there will be a delay of more than 72 hours before specimen can be shipped to laboratory, keep specimen frozen (-80°C) and ship on dry ice

Can any lab accept samples for COVID-19 testing?

Midwives can either:

- Ship sample(s) to their [local PHO Laboratory](#) or
- Ship sample(s) directly to [one of seven PHO Laboratories](#) that are processing specimens for COVID-19 testing (located in Toronto, Hamilton, Kingston, Ottawa, Timmins and London).

[Dynacare](#) laboratories are not currently processing tests for COVID-19. Dynacare is forwarding all samples to PHO for COVID-19 testing.

[LifeLabs](#) locations are accepting samples for COVID-19 testing, unless otherwise specified.

Midwives are encouraged to contact their local hospital(s) or community lab to check if they have the capacity to accept swabs taken from the community for COVID-19 testing.

How will I receive the test results?

Midwives will be notified by PHO once results become available. Presently, all positive and negative results are being reported to the local public health unit.

Ontario Health Digital Health Services has provided [instructions and information](#) for clinicians who use the Ontario Laboratories Information System (OLIS) to look up client results for COVID-19. Midwives who are registered to use OLIS will be able to find client COVID-19 results in the clinical viewer as soon as they are entered by the processing lab, if that lab has been connected to OLIS. Work is ongoing to get all COVID-19 testing labs feeding into the system, although most are connected now.

Clients and the public are now able to check their own test results through OLIS. Clients can sign up [here](#) to view their own COVID-19 results, whether or not their care providers are registered to use OLIS. This will not give clients access to other types of test results or reports

available in OLIS, and, like clinicians, they will only be able to view results from labs that are connected to the system.

Note: If you become aware that a client visited your clinic and has since tested positive for COVID-19, please notify your local public health unit. For more information about testing, [please contact PHO](#).