

Provincial Laboratory Services



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Health PEI
One Island Health System

Testing Guidance for COVID-19: Asymptomatic Testing & New Return to Work Criteria for Health Care Workers

July 27, 2020 (Replaces July 16, 2020)

This information applies to: Physicians, Nurse Practitioners, Administrators

Our knowledge about testing has expanded significantly since the first case of COVID-19 was diagnosed six months ago in Canada. Testing continues to be an important part of our screening and prevention strategy; however, testing of asymptomatic people has certain limitations. We would like to provide an update on asymptomatic testing as well as to provide **CURRENT AND NEW CRITERIA (in bold)** for testing for COVID-19 for both routine and stat purposes.

Cautions on asymptomatic testing

PEI's COVID-19 testing approach is based on local epidemiology and is aligned with Canadian testing guidance. Evidence suggests that symptomatic cases of COVID-19 are causing the majority of transmission. The primary goal is to test symptomatic people and the asymptomatic close contacts of the positive cases to prevent further transmission. Asymptomatic and pre-symptomatic transmission of COVID-19 can occur; however, more evidence is needed to determine the impact that this type of transmission has on the level of disease spread.

Both symptomatic and asymptomatic testing can result in false negatives. A person who tests negative may test positive if re-sampled at a later date during the incubation period. Asymptomatic testing outside of established guidelines or groups can lead to misinterpretation and a false sense of security.

PEI tests asymptomatic individuals who may be: 1) at greater risk of spreading COVID-19 to critical infrastructures, 2) less likely to indicate they have mild symptoms, and/or 3) more likely to have been exposed to cases due to their day-to-day activities or travel.

To date, all of PEI's COVID-19 cases have been linked to international and/or domestic travel. To address the ongoing risk of importation of COVID-19 into our province, PEI has implemented a strategic testing approach for both international and domestic travelers. In the event that unlinked cases are detected in PEI (i.e., community transmission), asymptomatic testing will be expanded within the local population.

Testing Guidelines

Emergency Department

- Any person presenting with new onset of fever without an alternative explanation or new or worsening cough, sore throat, rhinitis, marked fatigue, shortness of breath, chills, headache, myalgia, or acute loss of sense of smell or taste without an alternative explanation should be tested.
- Patients on self-isolation and undergoing a surgical procedure requiring or may require general anesthetic.

Community Clinics

- Any person presenting with new onset of fever without an alternative explanation or new or worsening cough, sore throat, rhinitis, marked fatigue, shortness of breath, chills, headache, myalgia, or acute loss of sense of smell or taste without an alternative explanation should be tested.
- Any person who was in close contact with (1) a symptomatic case starting 48 hours prior to the case developing symptoms or (2) a laboratory confirmed asymptomatic case starting 48 hours prior to the day their positive specimen was collected, should be tested 7 days after their last exposure to the case.

Cough and fever clinics are available to provide assessment, alternative explanation for symptoms and symptom management. All clients of the cough and fever clinic as well as swabbing clinics are being tested.

Testing and assessment clinics are available in Charlottetown and Summerside. These can be accessed through 811 or referred by a health care provider; email: Coughandfeverclinic@gov.pe.ca.

Admitted patients

- Any person hospitalized > 48hrs with influenza-like-illness (ILI; fever without an alternate explanation and new or worsening cough, sore throat, joint pain, muscle aches, fatigue).
- Any person admitted to the ICU with a respiratory symptom (if there is a strong non-viral alternative diagnosis contact the medical microbiologist).
- Patients that would otherwise be on self-isolation and undergoing a surgical procedure requiring or may require general anesthetic.
- Inpatients at Hillsborough Hospital, Provincial Addiction Treatment Facility, and Prince County Hospital Inpatient Psychiatry Unit should be tested on admission (routine test unless symptomatic; if symptomatic for COVID-19, Stat test).

Health Care Providers (HCP)

- Any current health care worker with a new cough and/or fever, sore throat, rhinitis, marked fatigue, shortness of breath, chills, headache, myalgia, or acute loss of sense of smell or taste without an alternative explanation should be tested.
- Health care providers including: locum physicians, new physicians, medical residents, nurses, NPs, and medical students on clinical rotations, who work at a healthcare site within Atlantic Canada should be tested on return to PEI (prior to returning to work at a healthcare site); e.g., works at QEII/IWK and QEHP/PCH; may qualify for Stat testing (as directed by CPHO).
- Health care providers who arrive from outside of Atlantic Canada should be tested prior to work at a PEI healthcare site and again at day 3 and day 7; may qualify for Stat testing (as directed by CPHO).
- Long-term care staff who travel for personal reasons within Atlantic Canada should be tested on return to PEI and at 7 days. If travel is a day trip, wait 48 hours before the first test. (Note: LTC staff who travel outside the Atlantic bubble must self-isolate for 14 days on return to PEI)

- Weekly testing of LTC staff (public and private) who work in more than one healthcare site, regardless of how frequent they work in LTC (e.g., staff member who works in LTC once a month would require testing every 7 days). For staff with very infrequent visits (i.e., less than monthly), an alternate approach is to test between 48 and 96 hours prior to working and test again at 7 days. For unscheduled/urgent work, staff can be tested after their work shift and again at 7 days.
- Weekly testing of Microbiology staff at the QEH.

Health Care Workers can be assessed for testing by calling: 1-855-354-4358.

Long-term Care/Community Care/Palliative Care Facilities – Residents

- Test residents of Long-term Care facility 24-48 hours before transfer/admission to the facility; if negative on initial test, test again at 7 days post admission; test again at day 10 and day 14 post admission.
- Test residents of Community Care or Palliative Care facility 24-48 hours before transfer/admission to the facility; if negative on initial test, test again at 7 days post admission.
- Due to an inability to comply with isolation requirements, patients or residents with dementia who are being admitted or readmitted to a LTC facility may be tested an additional time (i.e., on admission, at 3 or 4 days, and at 7, 10, and 14 days). Additional testing applies to *all* LTC residents with dementia, not just those living in a dedicated dementia household.

Inter-Facility Transfers

- Asymptomatic transfers to other acute care facilities (excluding LTC and CCF) do not require testing at this time, as there is no documented community transmission or reservoir in PEI hospitals.
- Testing can be provided for anyone who requires a test prior to procedure/surgery/ etc. at an out-of-province (OOP) facility.
- Inpatients returning from OOP facilities who were off-Island for ≤24 hours require routine testing at 48 hours; test again at 7 days post admission.
- Inpatients returning from OOP facilities who were off-Island for >24 hours require routine testing on arrival; test again at 7 days post admission.

Long-term Care/Community Care Facilities – Non-Essential Service Providers

- Weekly testing of non-essential service providers (e.g., hairdressers, foot care worker, seamstress, etc.) in Community Care and Long-term Care facilities.

Correctional Facility Admissions and Staff

- Test (routine testing) on admission to the facility (if had not already tested in past 48 hours); if negative on initial test, test again at 7 days post admission.
- **Weekly testing of correctional facility staff who work at more than 1 facility (e.g., corrections and LTC)**

Essential Workers with Travel Outside of Atlantic Canada

- PEI residents who are essential workers and travel **outside of Atlantic Canada** frequently (are home less than 14 days between work periods) can be tested upon their arrival in PEI, and 7 days if still on PEI, but no more than weekly unless symptoms occur.
- PEI residents who are essential workers and travel **outside of Atlantic Canada** for work but are home more than 14 days between work periods can be tested on arrival and again at 7 days post-arrival (or sooner if symptoms occur).

- Essential workers include, but are not limited to, construction workers, health care providers, those employed in the transportation of goods and services, child protection staff, workers in the energy sector, fisheries, agriculture, etc.

Temporary Foreign Workers

- Test temporary foreign workers between day 10 and 12 of self-isolation.

Summer Residents / Family Support

- Test summer residents arriving from **outside of Atlantic Canada** between day 10 and 12 of self-isolation.
- Family members arriving from **outside of Atlantic Canada** to provide support to PEI residents may be considered for testing on a case-by-case basis.

International Travelers

- Test between day 10 and 12 after arriving in PEI.

Screeners at Points of Entry

- Weekly testing for personnel screening travelers at points of entry (bridge, airport, and ferry terminals).

Postmortem

- Test upon autopsy

Testing Outside of Guidelines

- Contact the CPHO on call for consideration of testing outside of guidelines for outpatients, including any patients under the care of an ER physician.
- Contact the microbiologist on call for inpatients.

STAT TESTING

Routine testing for COVID-19 is offered multiple times per day with turnaround times between **6 and 24** hours upon receipt to the QEH Laboratory. The request for Stat testing must meet PEI guidance or be directed by the Chief Public Health Office or the Medical Microbiologist.

The following would be considered for Stat (vs routine) testing:

- ER for admitted patients at QEH, PCH, KCMH, Western Hospital that meet routine criteria.
- Patients admitted to the ICU or require critical care in the ED, all Code Blue cases.
- Symptomatic admissions to Labor and Delivery
- Symptomatic admissions to Hillsborough Hospital, Provincial Addiction Treatment Facility, and Prince County Hospital Inpatient Psychiatry Unit
- Symptomatic resident of long-term care (LTC)
- Symptomatic pediatric patients admitted to hospital
- Offenders with symptoms transported by police officers
- Requests approved by CPHO or the microbiologist on call (see Cases off Guidelines above)

All Stat microbiology requests require a phone call to the receiving laboratory. When ordering the test, information provided on the requisition will assist in clarifying if the test meets guidelines or has been previously approved. Microbiologist on call will review these documents and may contact the ordering provider or service as necessary.

Stat tests are provided at QEH microbiology in dedicated windows 8 AM, 10 AM, noon, 2 PM, 4 PM, 6 PM, 8 PM, 10 PM, as well as overnight by Hematology at 1 AM, 3 AM, and 5 AM. If there are times that testing needs to be completed even faster, i.e., “Critical”, then page the microbiologist on call directly. If overnight (after 11:30 PM), then contact Hematology technologist first to see if they can accommodate. The PCH testing process remains the same.

Return to Work Criteria for Health Care Workers with Confirmed COVID-19

Health care workers who tested positive for COVID-19, who were not hospitalized (i.e., only had mild to moderate illness) and who are not immunocompromised, may return to work 14 days after the date of the positive test and > 24 hours since resolution of symptoms other than a residual cough.

Health care workers who tested positive for COVID-19, who were hospitalized (i.e., had severe to critical illness) or who are immunocompromised, may return to work 20 days after the date of the positive test and > 24 hours since resolution of symptoms other than a residual cough.

As per recent CDC and other provincial guidance, testing prior to return to work at a facility may no longer be required, but may be provided/indicated on a case-by-case basis.

For on Guidelines or CPHO/Microbiologist on call approved Stat testing call:

Time	QEH Microbiology Testing	PCH Main Lab
8 am – 4 pm	894-2312	438-4285
4pm – 11:30	2111 (ask for Microbiology tech)	438-4285
11:30 pm – 8 am	2111 (ask for Hematology tech)	438-4285

The Chief/Deputy Public Health Officers may be reached through locating at QEH or CPHO 902-368-4996 or CPHO nurse on-call 1-902-213-5824.

The Medical Microbiologist may be reached through locating or through 902-894-2515.

Thank you all for your cooperation and dedication to all Islanders in these challenging times.

Please let us know if you have any questions or clarifications.

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