

New Provincial COVID-19 Testing Guidelines and Treatment

Recently, [B.C.'s COVID-19 testing guidance](#) has been updated to reflect the high vaccination coverage in this province and the low severity of disease generally experienced with the Omicron variant. Many patients who would previously have been eligible for a test are now directed to stay home until they feel well enough to resume their normal activities, and to manage their illness without testing. Testing criteria includes those who may be at higher risk of more serious illness and potentially eligible for treatment, and those who live or work in high-risk settings. Physicians and their clinical office staff are eligible for testing if they develop symptoms.

Who is eligible for a COVID-19 test?

People with [symptoms consistent with COVID-19 who meet certain criteria](#) are eligible for a COVID-19 test at health authority testing sites or when admitted to hospital. Before referring a patient for a test, please review these guidelines to ensure they are eligible. Patients can also utilize [B.C.'s COVID-19 Self-Assessment Tool](#) to determine if testing is advised.

Why have the COVID-19 testing guidelines been updated?

With B.C.'s high vaccination coverage, and the mild disease experienced by most people infected with the Omicron variant, testing for most individuals will not change clinical management.

What about my patients who have other immunocompromising conditions not listed in the provincial guidance?

Fully vaccinated patients with medical conditions other than those specified in the provincial testing guidelines are not eligible for testing at a health authority operated testing site. The same is true for household contacts and caregivers of those with medical conditions not included in the current guidance.

Are children and youth eligible for testing under the new guidance?

COVID-19 is a more mild illness for the vast majority of children. Getting testing does not change the medical guidance or care they receive. Children with symptoms should stay home from school or daycare if they feel ill. They can return once they are well enough to resume regular activities.

Staff or children who are contacts may continue to attend school or daycare, regardless of their vaccination status, unless they develop symptoms and/or test positive for COVID-19. Children and youth aged 17 or under are only eligible for testing if they meet the testing criteria (i.e. have one of the specific immune compromising conditions).

You can reach a Medical Health Officer at 604.675.3900 / toll free at 1.855.675.3900
For public health emergencies after hours contact the Medical Health Officer on call at 604.527.4893

Vancouver Coastal Health Medical Health Officers

Chief Medical Health Officer: Dr. Patricia Daly

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Vancouver: Dr. Althea Hayden, Dr. Michael Schwandt 604.675.3900 | Richmond: Dr. Meena Dawar 604.233.3170

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Can I refer patients to a public testing site by writing an attestation letter or a referral letter?

We ask that you do not refer patients who are not eligible for testing to VCH-operated testing sites. The eligibility criteria ensures inclusion of patients for whom testing may change management. All others are asked to self-manage their illness at home, once symptoms remain mild.

Should patients who have tested positive with a rapid antigen test receive confirmatory PCR testing?

Additional confirmatory testing is not required. Given the high pre-test probability with the current circulating levels of COVID-19 in B.C., a positive rapid antigen test result is sufficient for confirmation.

If patients are not eligible for testing, what should they tell their contacts? Is this different from the advice that people would get about contact tracing if they were tested?

Public health is no longer following up contacts of cases, including those who test positive. Contact tracing is only considered to be effective when the risk posed by exposure to a specific contact is substantially higher than the general risk of exposure in the community, which is no longer the case in B.C.. People with COVID-19, whether they test positive or have symptoms, are not required to notify contacts. If they choose to do so (e.g. to notify members of their household), their contacts are not required to self-isolate. More information is available on [the BCCDC website](#).

What treatments are currently recommended and available for COVID-19?

Most people with COVID-19 will recover on their own and no treatment is recommended. Treatments have recently become available in B.C. for cases early in their course of illness who are at higher risk of hospitalization. Current medications are sotrovimab (monoclonal antibody) and nirmatrelvir/ritonavir (Paxlovid™, a direct-acting oral antiviral). As these treatments must be initiated within 5 days of illness onset, a provincial process to ensure rapid access to treatments is under development. An interim referral process is in place that is triggered when an individual tests positive. Current testing criteria includes all those potentially eligible. Rather than referring your patients for treatment, please direct them to get tested. If patients are provided a rapid antigen test, encourage them to self-report their positive result via [the provincial survey](#), which screens for treatment eligibility.

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