

**Subject: Testing for influenza, COVID-19 and other respiratory viruses in Long-Term Care and Retirement Homes**

**Date: October 20, 2020**

With influenza season approaching, Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health (WDGPH) would like to remind Long-Term Care and Retirement Homes to be prepared to respond to outbreaks of any respiratory virus. Facilities should ensure they have an adequate and appropriate supply of specimen collection kits. Facilities can refer to the [COVID-19 PCR Collection Kits](#) page on Public Health Ontario's website for a guide to which swabs and media are suitable for influenza rapid testing, COVID-19 testing and multiplex testing. Please note that molecular transport media (i.e. media containing guanidine) is not suitable for influenza rapid testing. In addition, specimens collected using expired swabs or media will be rejected.

Facilities in Wellington County, Dufferin County, and the City of Guelph can order swabs from Ontario Health using the [Regional COVID-19 Portal](#). It can take up to 72 hours to receive requested swabs. If swabs are needed more urgently, please contact WDG Public Health Call Centre or after-hours number.

Long-Term Care and Retirement Homes should continue to test all residents and staff with symptoms of respiratory illness for COVID-19. In addition, symptomatic persons are also eligible to be tested for influenza and/or other respiratory viruses (generally limited to the first 4 specimens submitted). If you suspect an outbreak in your facility (2 or more symptomatic residents and/or staff with 2 or more symptoms within 2 days, or one confirmed case of COVID-19 or influenza), contact WDG Public Health at 1-800-265-7293 ext. 4752 or after-hours number to report it. WDG Public Health will provide an investigation/outbreak number if required, and will help to determine which viruses to test for and can assist with the correct completion of the requisition form. The [PHO Laboratory COVID-19 Virus Test Requisition form](#) is preferred over the General Test Requisition form. When completing the form, ensure the appropriate test requested is selected (i.e., COVID alone or also other respiratory viruses), that "institution/all group living settings" is selected in Patient Setting/Type, and the assigned Investigation/Outbreak No" (if applicable) is included.

Facilities should contact WDG Public Health Call Centre or after-hours number to make arrangements for the pick up of swabs/specimens for residents/staff that are symptomatic or related to an outbreak. **These swabs/specimens should not be transported through other lab arrangements as this could delay testing and results for outbreaks.** It may take 4-10 days to receive COVID-19 test results. If assistance is needed in obtaining swab results for residents/staff that are symptomatic or related to an outbreak, contact WDG Public Health Call Centre. Please note that WDGPH is not able to provide swab pick up or assist with obtaining test results for asymptomatic staff surveillance testing.

For further information on testing, specimen collection (including preferred and acceptable specimen types) and handling instructions, refer to the [COVID-19 PCR](#) page on Public Health Ontario's website.

**Additional Resources:**

- Public Health Ontario. Labstract: Respiratory Virus Testing Update (October 2020). Available from: <https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/lab/lab-sd-121-respiratory-viral-testing-algorithm-enhanced-surveillance-update.pdf?la=en>
- Public Health Ontario. At A Glance: Planning for respiratory virus outbreaks in congregate living settings (September 2020). Available from: <https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/ncov/cong/2020/09/respiratory-virus-outbreaks-congregate-living-settings.pdf?la=en>

**For more information:**

**Contact:** WDG Public Health Call Centre at 1-800-265-7293 ext. 7006  
After Hours at 1-877-884-8653  
[www.wdgpUBLICHEALTH.ca](http://www.wdgpUBLICHEALTH.ca)