

COVID-19 PCR Testing Best Practices for the Collection, Handling, Storage and Transportation of Specimens

This job aid provides information on the best practices for the collection, handling, storing and transportation of COVID-19 PCR specimens.

Complete the Requisition

Ensure the requisition has been completed at the appropriate stage of the collection process.

- OLIS-MORE log-in link and additional information can be found here:

[OLIS-MORE | Ontario Health](#)

- OLIS Self-Collection additional information can be found here:

[OLIS Self-Collection | Ontario Health](#)

Handling, Storage and Transport

Labelling the Specimen Test Tube

Always label the test tube with the following:

- Date of collection
- Patient's full name
- At least one additional identifier (e.g., Health card number or date of birth)
- If using a sticker, affix the sticker to the test tube longitudinally



Specimen Collection and Handling

Leaking specimens will be rejected by the laboratory.

- Confirm the test tube cap is closed tightly to avoid leakage
- Place test tube in the biohazard specimen bag
- Add absorbent material inside the main compartment of the biohazard bag next to the test tube
- Absorbent material must be sufficient to absorb the entire content of the tube in the event of spillage (paper towel can be used)
- Do NOT process the specimen further if leakage is discovered



Storing the Specimens

- Specimens should be storage between 2 and 8 degrees Celsius following collection
- Collected specimens should be shipped to the lab the same day they are collected to ensure specimen integrity and a timely public health response in the case of a positive COVID-19 result
- If transport of specimen to testing laboratory will be delayed more than 72 hours, specimens should be frozen at minus 70 degrees Celsius or below and shipped on dry ice
- Specimens are not to be stored in a refrigerator that is used for the purposes of storing food and drink or other medications and vaccines

Packaging the Specimen for Transport

Packaging must include:

- Sealable plastic bag
- Rigid packaging (e.g., cardboard box)
- Ice pack
- Shipping label



The following instructions are for ground transportation between two points within Canada only

Always refer to the latest edition of the Transportation of Dangerous Goods Regulations (TDGR) and requirements listed in the [Temporary Certificate TU-0764](#).

Valid for the duration of the exemption period from the Temporary Certificate TU 0764 (until July 31, 2025 or the day it is cancelled in writing by the Minister of Transport).

- Place ice pack in outer packaging
- Ice packs should be placed in the outer rigid packaging to preserve specimen during transport
- Ensure the ice pack is placed in a sealable plastic bag to prevent wetness due to condensation
- Place sealed biohazard bags containing specimens into sealable plastic bag and place in outer rigid packaging
- Print PDF of labels and tape on sealed cardboard box with complete the address (To/From)
- Complete the address and telephone number for both labels



Do not use:

- Grocery bags
- Garbage bags
- Paper bags
- Envelopes
- File Folders
- Gloves

Risks of not following the instructions may results in samples being lost or delayed, risk to public if the sample leaks and risk of fines by Transport Canada.



Ordering Supplies and Personal Protective Equipment

- Testing supplies and PPE for use in the testing program can be ordered on the [Ontario PPE Supply Portal](#)
- Supplies Expiry Extension Notices can be located at: [COVID-19 Health System Response Materials | Ontario Health](#)

Additional Information

- For further details on publicly funded COVID-19 testing, please see the latest MOH Executive Officer Notice: [Publicly funded COVID-19 Testing Services in Ontario Pharmacies](#)
- If you have any questions about COVID-19 Testing Services in Pharmacies, please contact OPDPInfoBox@ontario.ca
- For OLIS-Mobile Order and Result Entry (MORE) Service assistance, please contact the Ontario Health Service Desk by phone at: 1-866-250-1554 or by email at OH-DS_servicedesk@ontariohealth.ca

Need this information in an accessible format? 1-877-280-8538, TTY 1-800-855-0511, info@ontariohealth.ca.

Document disponible en français en contactant info@ontariohealth.ca