

MEMO

To: Ottawa Physicians, Nurse Practitioners, Walk-In Clinics, Travel Clinics, Community Health Centres, Emergency Departments, Infection Control, HEPCO, Pharmacists, Midwives, Retirement Homes, Long Term Care Homes

Date: March 18, 2020

From: Dr. Monir Taha, Associate Medical Officer of Health, Ottawa Public Health (OPH)

Subject: **COVID-19: Supplementary information on testing recommendations**

Dear Colleagues,

For COVID-19 information see OPH's Physician and Health Care Professionals Coronavirus website (www.ottawapublichealth.ca/ncov), or call 613-580-6744

A. Health care workers

Following our ERMS on [March 16, 2020](#), OPH received questions about our recommendation that health care workers (HCWs) with "*acute respiratory illness, including mild illness*" be tested, regardless of exposure or travel history.

Specifically, we wish to clarify the definition of "mild illness." OPH recommends testing individuals with any of the following new respiratory symptoms: fever, cough, sputum production, difficulty breathing, sore throat, or rhinorrhea. General symptoms such as fatigue, malaise, headache, dizziness, or loss of appetite would NOT on their own be sufficient to require COVID-19 testing. If general symptoms are accompanied or followed by a new respiratory symptom, OPH would recommend COVID-19 testing.

OPH recommends a low COVID-19 testing threshold be applied to HCWs given that the consequences of an infected HCW spreading this virus to colleagues or vulnerable patients is significant.

If tested, OPH recommends that the HCW be placed on self-isolation until a negative test result is received. Following a negative test result, the usual guidance for return to work is 24 hours after symptom resolution or as directed by Occupational Health at their institution. We appreciate that this recommendation may create staffing challenges in some clinics, and this may place a personal burden on you. Thank you for your continued support as we work together to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 in our community.

B. Symptomatic Individuals who reside in other institutions

In addition, we wanted to clarify that our recommendation for COVID-19 testing on "*individuals who reside in other institutions*" includes patients from correctional facilities, homeless shelters, and group homes. Please note, these other institutions would also be notifying OPH directly if they identify a possible respiratory outbreak in their facilities.

As of March 17, 2020, at 10:30 a.m., there have been 13 cases of COVID-19 reported in Ottawa. OPH continues to reach out directly to identified close contacts.

Testing for COVID-19 is **NOT** recommended if a person is asymptomatic.