



Do I need a COVID PCR test?



Most people with COVID symptoms no longer need a PCR test. If you have COVID symptoms, assume you have COVID.

What is a PCR test?

A Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) test detects COVID genetic material. It is the most reliable test for detecting the virus.

COVID PCR tests are usually done by a trained health professional at an assessment centre, pharmacy or clinic. Using a swab, a sample is taken from deep inside your nostril. In some cases, you can test yourself with a PCR kit, collecting samples from your saliva or inside your mouth and nostrils. The samples are taken to a lab, clinic or hospital and the results are usually available in 24 hours or more.



As of March 9, 2022, PCR tests in Ontario can be used only in certain situations, including:

- » People who live, work, volunteer, visit or are admitted to “highest risk” settings, including hospitals, long-term care homes and shelters, and their household members
- » Healthcare workers who see patients and the household members of those workers
- » People living in or visiting First Nation, Inuit and Métis communities
- » Pregnant people, first responders, people who are underhoused or homeless and temporary foreign workers living in a shared space
- » Students and staff in schools where kits are provided
- » People who face a higher risk of COVID causing serious illness or death and who may qualify for new COVID treatments

Testing centres and emergency rooms will not provide a COVID test if you do not qualify.

The PCR test is very sensitive; even after recovering, you can test positive for several weeks.

Some people with COVID may benefit from medications that reduce their risk of serious illness. In most cases, doctors can write a prescription without a PCR test to confirm COVID, but some situations require a test. To learn more about COVID treatments, see rebrand.ly/COVID-medications.

Rapid Antigen Tests (RATs) can be used by people with symptoms to confirm that they have COVID. For more information about RATs, see rebrand.ly/Using-RATs.

Remember, if you have symptoms of COVID, assume you have COVID. For more information, see rebrand.ly/Feeling-Unwell.

If you think you qualify for a PCR test, this website helps you find nearby COVID testing centres: <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/assessment-centre-locations/>

A complete list of who qualifies for testing is available at: rebrand.ly/MoH-Contact-Management