Do I need a COVID PCR test?

The high number of people with COVID in Ontario means that we have had to change how we use tests to confirm infection.

**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 February 3, 2022, PCR tests in Ontario can be used only for:**

- 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

Updated: Feb. 14, 2022
For other questions, please visit [ConfusedAboutCOVID.ca](ConfusedAboutCOVID.ca).
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.

Talk with your family doctor about treatment if you have COVID symptoms AND:

» A weak or very weak immune system. People often have very weak immune systems from:
  ✓ Active cancer treatments
  ✓ Having had an organ or stem-cell transplants
  ✓ Rare genetic disorders like DiGeorge Syndrome that impair your immune system
  ✓ Advanced or untreated HIV
  ✓ Medications that weaken the immune system including antimetabolites like methotrexate, biologic drugs (often ending in ‘mab’, ‘mib’, or ‘nib’) and high-dose steroids (Prednisone 20mg or higher)

» Are over 60
» Are over 50 and Indigenous
» Are over 50 AND have any of these issues:
  ✓ Diabetes
  ✓ Serious kidney problems
  ✓ Obesity
  ✓ Intellectual disability
  ✓ Cerebral palsy
  ✓ Sickle cell disease

**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.

Remember, if you have symptoms of COVID, assume you have COVID. For more information, see [rebrand.ly/Feeling-Unwell](https://rebrand.ly/Feeling-Unwell).

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**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/](https://covid-19.ontario.ca/assessment-centre-locations/)

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

For information on how to use Rapid Antigen Tests (RATs), see [rebrand.ly/Using-RATs](https://rebrand.ly/Using-RATs).