

MEMORANDUM

## Changes to Respiratory Virus Specimen Testing

March 9, 2020

**To: Long Term Care Homes, Retirement Homes, and other Institutions in Ontario**  
**From: Public Health Ontario**

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As of **March 9, 2020**, individual respiratory virus specimens and respiratory outbreak specimens from [institutions](#) will routinely be tested for [COVID-19](#) in addition to the [usual respiratory testing](#) conducted at the Public Health Ontario Laboratory. This testing is part of overall laboratory surveillance for COVID-19.

There is **no change** to your usual practices for submitting respiratory virus specimens. As per the 2018 [Respiratory Infection Outbreak guidelines](#), droplet and contact precautions are routinely recommended for the collection of respiratory specimens from residents with acute respiratory illness (i.e., gown, gloves, mask and eye protection).

Long-term care homes (LTCH) with residents or staff suspected to have COVID-19 should follow guidance from their [local public health unit](#) and the [Ministry of Health](#) for the management and [testing](#).

Any positive detection for COVID-19 in a respiratory virus specimen is reported to the local public health unit who will advise on case or outbreak management as part of public health follow-up and if applicable, the outbreak management team.

**For more information:**

[Public Health Ontario - Laboratory](#)