

Voluntary school-based saliva testing for COVID-19

Dear **SCHOOL NAME:**

As announced by the Minister of Education on November 26, 2020 and in partnership with York Region, York Catholic District School Board, York Region District School Board, Ontario Health and the Public Health Ontario Laboratory, on-site saliva testing for COVID-19 will be offered for your school community. Students, school staff and immediate family members of students can receive a COVID-19 test at a convenient location with limited wait times.

The type of test offered will be saliva based. Saliva tests are less invasive for a child and have a similar test sensitivity for detecting COVID-19 as a traditional Nasal Pharyngeal (NP) swab.

Why are you offering COVID-19 testing at schools?

In September, the Ontario Government announced a four-week pilot to test up to 34,000 students in four communities in Ontario. York Region, Peel Region, the City of Toronto and City of Ottawa were selected to participate in this initiative.

While recent case numbers of COVID-19 have been rising in York Region, to date, the school setting has not been a proven driver of transmission but does reflect community transmission. Offering on-site testing at a school, or a school in a local catchment area, allows York Region Public Health to:

- Help families and individuals who would like to get a test by removing some of the barriers to testing such as location, appointment difficulties or lack of transportation
- Support our case finding in schools and provide a more thorough understanding of where transmission may be occurring

Testing is voluntary and for students under 18 years of age, consent will be required from parents or guardians. Immediate family members are welcome to get tested as well at the testing location. Testing is being administered by Ontario Health.

How were schools selected for this initiative?

The Ministry of Education outlined the requirements for schools to be considered for the pilot. In York Region, schools chosen to be part of the initiative:

- Have had recent or current confirmed case(s) of COVID-19; OR
- Have cohorts that were recently or are currently dismissed; OR
- Are located in the geographic area of the secondary school selected with no confirmed cases or dismissed cohort; OR
- Are located in an area underserved for COVID-19 testing due to distance from a COVID-19 Assessment Centre

When will testing be offered?

Students, school staff and members of the immediate family members of students attending invited schools can receive a COVID-19 test:

PUBLIC HEALTH

1-877-464-9675
TTY 1-866-512-6228
york.ca/SafeAtSchool



- **Date:** TBD
- **Time:** TBD
- **Location:** TBD (in the school gymnasium)

Please ensure you have all required information when you arrive for your test. Participants will be asked to provide a valid Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP) card for each person being tested, however a valid OHIP card is not required to receive a test. A York Region Public Health Nurse will be available on site to answer any questions you may have.

What happens after I get tested?

After being tested, you must self-isolate while waiting for results **if** you have:

- Been identified as a close contact of a confirmed case of COVID-19; OR
- Travelled outside of Canada in the last 14 days; OR
- Symptoms of COVID-19; OR
- Been tested due to a potential exposure to someone with COVID-19 or part of a cohort of students that have been dismissed at a school

If you **have not** travelled outside of Canada, or had close contact with a case, and you have no symptoms, **you can return to your regular activities**. A follow-up test is not required. Please continue to monitor yourself for new symptoms or signs of COVID-19.

More information when to self-isolate is included in the attached Frequently Asked Questions.

In alignment with current public health guidance, if an individual **tests positive** for COVID-19, the individual must self-isolate at home for the recommended 10-day isolation period. York Region Public Health will be notified of the positive test result and will begin routine case management and contact tracing processes, similarly if an individual tests positive after being tested at an Assessment Centre.

If your result is **negative**, continue to monitor for signs and symptoms of COVID-19 and get re-tested if symptoms develop.

Thank you for your ongoing commitment to stop the spread of COVID-19. Please continue to follow public health advice including adhering to social gathering limits, wearing face masks or coverings and maintaining a 2-metre physical distance from others. By taking steps to limit the transmission of COVID-19, we help limit further transmission into our long-term care homes, our workplaces and our schools. Together we can keep our families and communities healthy and safe.

For more information on COVID-19 and staying safe at school visit york.ca/SafeAtSchool

Questions

If you have any questions about the school-based testing initiative, please call Health Connection at 1-800-361-5653. Additional information is also provided in the attached Frequently Asked Questions.

For general information about COVID-19 including symptoms, location of Assessment Centres in York Region and other resources, please visit our website at york.ca/covid19 or call Access York at 1-877-464-9675.

FAQS: VOLUNTARY SALIVA-BASED COVID-19 SCHOOL TESTING

When will testing occur?

York Region Public Health and its partners will be running this school-based testing initiative throughout the month of December 2020. The exact date and time of testing for your school community is included in the letter. Testing is being provided on site by Ontario Health.

Who can get tested as part of this school-based testing initiative?

All students and school staff of invited schools and immediate family members of students attending invited schools can receive a COVID-19 test at a convenient location with limited wait times. Both students enrolled in face-to-face learning and online learning and their immediate family members are welcome to participate.

Does my child have to get tested?

This testing initiative is voluntary; students and staff are not required to be tested for COVID-19. Parent/guardian consent is required.

Note: If a child is showing symptoms of COVID-19 or has had close contact with a confirmed case, testing is strongly encouraged. As always, parents/guardians should continue to screen their child(ren) for symptoms daily using the provincial [COVID-19 school and child care screening tool](#). Please use this screening tool to understand when testing is recommended, if the child needs to self-isolate and how long they should self-isolate for.

Where will testing take place?

Testing will occur on-site at the local secondary school in the catchment area for the selected elementary and secondary schools. The exact location for your school community is provided in the letter you have received.

What kind of test is being conducted?

This initiative will be using saliva-based testing. The gold standard method of specimen collection is the Nasal Pharyngeal (NP) swab, but the use of saliva as a collection method in Ontario may ensure more accessible testing, particularly for children. Saliva testing is 91% effective at detecting COVID-19. This is very similar to NP testing that is 94% effective.

Using saliva also provides the option of specimen self-collection, which can help reduce the amount of close contact required at the testing site. Public Health Ontario Laboratory began accepting saliva testing on October 5, 2020.

The laboratory testing of saliva is performed the same way as the testing of a nasal swab. The only difference is how and where the sample is collected.

Do I need a health card to get a test?

Participants will be asked to provide a valid Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP) card, however a valid OHIP card is not a requirement to receive a test. If multiple family members are being tested, please bring the OHIP card for every individual.

What can I expect?

Ontario Health will conduct the on-site testing. A York Region Public Health nurse will also be on site to provide assistance and answer questions.

Before your test:

- Drink a cup of water 60 minutes before your test, to ensure you are well-hydrated
- You cannot eat, drink, chew gum, vape or smoke 30 minutes prior to the test

When you arrive, you can expect to follow these steps:

1. Arrive in school parking lot
2. Line up at entrance to gym, spaced two metres apart, wearing a mask
3. Enter gymnasium and perform hand hygiene (e.g., use the provided hand sanitizer)
4. Proceed to registration area to provide the required information and receive your specimen kit
5. Perform hand hygiene again and remove your mask.
6. Provide your specimen in private area. Seal your specimen kit
7. Perform hand hygiene and put your mask back on.
8. Bring specimen kit to drop off area and give your kit to staff working
9. Exit from opposite door
10. Return to your vehicle and return home (individuals may need to self-isolate while waiting for test results depending on situation; please see directions provided on page 3 and 4)

It is important to follow the instructions you are given for collecting your saliva sample. You will be required to stop swallowing and let the saliva pool in your mouth. Then gently release the saliva into a container, being careful not to contaminate the outside of the container.

[Saliva Sample - \(Neat\) with Straw](#)

[Saliva Sample - \(Neat\) with Funnel](#)

How long will it take to do the test?

We estimate it will take approximately 15 minutes for a participant to be tested, from start to finish.

When will I get my results?

Typically, results are available within 24 to 48 hours after the test has been completed, however, the **turnaround times for saliva tests will be longer than with nasal swabs**. Test results will be available online at covid-19.ontario.ca. Ontario Health will follow-up with individuals without OHIP.

York Region Public Health will ONLY call you if your test result is positive.

What happens after I am tested - can I return to normal activities if I am waiting for results?

If you have not travelled outside of Canada, or had close contact with a case, and you have no symptoms, you can return to your regular activities. A follow-up test is not required. Please continue to monitor yourself for new symptoms or signs of COVID-19.

You must self-isolate while waiting for your results if you have:

- Been identified as a close contact of a confirmed case of COVID-19; OR
- Travelled outside of Canada in the last 14 days; OR
- Symptoms of COVID-19; OR
- Been tested due to a potential exposure to someone with COVID-19 or part of a cohort of students that have been dismissed at a school

Continue to monitor for signs and symptoms of COVID-19 and get re-tested if symptoms develop.

What happens if my child/I test positive and am asymptomatic?

You can have COVID-19 and not have any symptoms or have very mild symptoms. When you are tested, if there is virus in the sample, the test is very effective at picking it up.

- Anyone with a positive test result should [self-isolate](#) for 10 days from the start of symptoms. If you have no symptoms and tested positive, self-isolate for 10 days from the date of your COVID-19 test
- If you have a positive test, it is important you self-isolate even if you are feeling okay so you do not spread the virus to others
- Your household members and other close contacts should self-isolate for 14 days from their last contact with you

What if we are waiting for a test result, my child/myself attend a school with confirmed cases and their cohort/class is directed to self-isolate?

When cases are associated with school locations, Public Health will investigate and determine if they need to declare an outbreak. Public Health will provide recommendations on cohort(s) isolation, and the potential need for full or partial school dismissal based on the scope of the outbreak.

If Public Health has assessed the situation and your child's cohort has been dismissed, please keep your child at home and monitor them for symptoms of COVID-19.

Public Health will communicate daily with the school principal and school staff to monitor for any new symptomatic staff or students and they provide ongoing advice on any additional testing and self-isolation required. Public Health will advise when students and staff are safe to return to school.

If your child attended school with a confirmed case, their cohort was dismissed, but they do not have symptoms, family/household members can continue go to work/school if they do not have any symptoms.

Please remember, if your child is ill, they must stay home from school for 14 days from the date their cohort was dismissed.

What if we are waiting for a test result and my child/myself attend a school with confirmed cases but their cohort/class is NOT directed to self-isolate?

You are not required to [self-isolate](#) while waiting for your test results. Members of your household are also not required to self-isolate and can continue to go to work and go to school if they remain symptom-free.

What if we are waiting for a test result and my child/myself attend a school with NO confirmed cases, NO dismissed cohorts, and NO other exposures?

You are not required to [self-isolate](#) while waiting for your test results. Members of your household are also not required to self-isolate and can continue to go to work and go to school if they remain symptom-free.

What if I am/my child is told to self-isolate?

- Stay home unless you require urgent medical care; do not go to work, school, run errands or use public transportation
- Arrange for essential items such as food and medication to be delivered to your home while you are self-isolating
- Separate yourself from other people in your home - stay in a separate room and use a separate washroom if possible. If you cannot self-isolate in your current living arrangement, discuss alternative options with public health when they call
- Wear a surgical mask when you are within two metres of other people or if leaving your home to seek urgent care. If you cannot wear a mask, others should wear a surgical mask when they are around you
- Wash your hands thoroughly and often for at least 15 seconds, using soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer
- Cover coughs and sneezes - be sure to cover your mouth and nose and throw tissues into a lined garbage
- Clean and disinfect all frequently touched surfaces in your home at least once a day
- Refer to the [Self-Isolation Fact Sheet](#) for more details

Will I be asked to get a second test for COVID-19?

When someone is tested for COVID-19, the results will show if the person is positive for COVID-19 and a number known as the cycle threshold (CT) value. This number represents the amount of virus an individual has in their system. If your test shows a low positive CT value, you may need to be retested to help us confirm your results and determine what next steps need to be taken, however we do not expect this to be a common concern for most participants

How many schools have been invited to participate?

23 elementary schools and 7 secondary schools in York Region have been selected, including schools located in the following cities and towns:

- City of Vaughan
- City of Markham
- City of Richmond Hill
- Town of Georgina
- Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville
- Township of King
- Town of Aurora

How were schools selected?

The Ministry of Education outlined the requirements for schools to be considered for the pilot. In York Region, schools chosen to be part of the initiative are:

- Elementary/secondary schools with confirmed cases of COVID-19 where cohorts have been dismissed to self-isolate for 14 days
- Elementary schools in the same secondary school catchment area with no confirmed cases of COVID-19 and no classes that have been dismissed
- Private schools in the geographic area of the secondary school identified for testing
- Communities located at greater distances from the four COVID-19 Assessment Centres in York Region

Will this initiative be extended?

At this time, the Ministry of Education has not announced any plans to expand the school-based testing initiative into 2021. York Region Public Health will work with the local school boards to provide updates as they become available.

Where can I get more information?

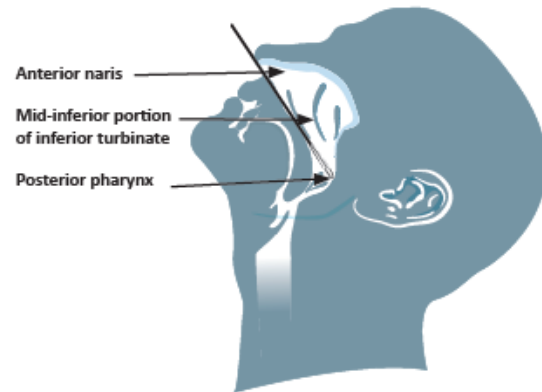
- If you have questions regarding COVID-19 and safety at school please visit york.ca/SafeAtSchool
- If you have general questions on COVID-19 in York Region please visit york.ca/covid19
- If you have any questions or concerns about COVID-19, please call your health care provider, Access York at 1-877-464-9675 or Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000

York Region Public Health would like to remind parents/guardians of the importance of using the [COVID-19 school and child care screening](#) daily.

There are several ways to collect a sample for a COVID-19 test.

1. Nasopharyngeal (NP) Swab

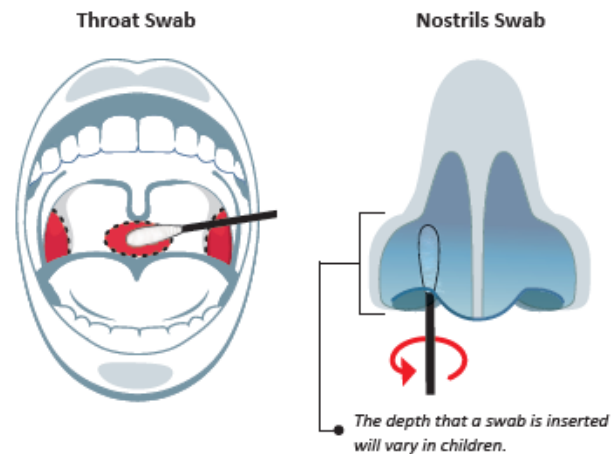
The NP swab is considered the best method to collect a sample for a COVID-19 test. It provides the highest sensitivity (95%) to detect the virus.



In a seated position, tilt the head back at a 70° angle.

2. Combined Throat and Nostrils Swab

Swabbing the throat and nostrils is the preferred alternative to an NP swab. It provides 92% sensitivity compared to the NP swab.



3. Saliva Test

Saliva testing is another acceptable method of testing. It is less sensitive (91%) compared to the NP and combined throat and nose methods.

A patient must drink a cup of water 60 minutes before giving a sample. This ensures they are hydrated enough to produce saliva; however, some patients may have difficulty producing enough saliva for testing.

