

OTTAWA COVID-19 TESTING TASKFORCE

Special Bulletin: August 27, 2021

Back to school and COVID-19 testing

With students returning to classrooms, the Ottawa COVID-19 Testing Taskforce is closely monitoring COVID-19 case counts, in addition to assessment centre capacity and the community's testing needs. In response, each of Ottawa's assessment centres and care clinics will remain open this September for children, youth, and adults who require a COVID-19 test according to the province's current testing criteria. Ottawa's labs and testing locations have also increased staffing levels in anticipation of kids returning to school.

Parents and educators who have further questions about COVID-19 testing this school year are encouraged to review the details below.

When to get tested for COVID-19

Parents, students and staff must complete the [COVID-19 School and Childcare screening tool](#) daily. They must follow the steps recommended by the tool, including staying home and seeking a COVID-19 test if required.

Ongoing screening is important to keep each other safe this school year. If a child develops new or worsening symptoms or has been exposed to someone with COVID-19, please visit Ottawa Public Health's website to find the best assessment centre for you and your family.

Where to get tested for COVID-19

The Moodie and Ray Friel COVID-19 Care and Testing Centres and the CHEO Assessment Centre at Brewer Park Arena provide a great kid-friendly testing experience. Ottawa's Community Health Centres (CHCs) are also able to assess and test children.

CHEO tests children over two months old; Moodie, Ray Friel and the CHCs test children over six months of age; and the drive-thru on Coventry Road tests youth over 10 years old.

A list of assessment centres in Ottawa and details to book a test can be found at OttawaPublicHealth.ca/CovidTesting.

What to expect from testing sites this school year

It is important to note several key differences this school year compared to the 2020 school year. Last fall, Ottawa's assessment centres and labs needed to scale up operations with additional equipment, resources, and staff to be able to meet the community's needs and produce timely results. Additionally, with the move to appointment-based testing, there are no longer long lines or wait times. Same-day or next-day appointments are available, which is our goal.

Ottawa’s labs have also significantly cut down the number of backlogged tests, and results are consistently available within 48 hours, and often in only 24 hours.

To further alleviate potential demand on assessment centres, take-home test kits will begin rolling out across schools in Ottawa. Students and staff attending a school where these test kits are available, and who are exposed to COVID-19 or who develop symptoms can conduct a take-home self-collection kit that is then dropped off at school or an assessment centre for testing in the lab. This program was successfully piloted in Ottawa schools this past spring and in multiple day camps this summer.

There is also greater clarity around symptom guidance in comparison to September of last year. Parents should seek testing for their child if a symptom is new or worsening and not related to other known causes or conditions. For example, students who have symptoms due to pre-existing or ongoing conditions, such as allergies, will not require a test to attend school. As anticipated, the [list of new symptoms](#) that would warrant a COVID-19 test in children has just been released, which will also reduce testing demand and focus our testing efforts on children most likely to have COVID-19. Children who develop symptoms that are no longer on the list would still stay home from school until their symptoms resolve but would not need a COVID-19 test.

The Taskforce and its partners will continue to evaluate demand and, if required, can increase assessment centre capacity to ensure COVID-19 testing remains accessible to Ottawa residents.

Ottawa COVID-19 Testing Taskforce members

- CHEO
- City of Ottawa, Office of Emergency Management
- Eastern Ontario Regional Laboratory Association (EORLA)
- Hôpital Montfort
- Kids Come First Health Team
- Ottawa Community Health Centres
- Ottawa Health Team - Équipe Santé Ottawa
- Ottawa Public Health
- Public Health Ontario Laboratory (PHOL)
- Queensway Carleton Hospital
- The Ottawa Hospital