

## **Can COVID-19 Testing Be Accessible?**

About 2.6 million people in Ontario have a disability, yet there are still many barriers for people with disabilities to get tested for COVID-19. We have identified some of these barriers and provided alternatives when possible.

Remember that every public health unit has their own way of doing things, so some of these options might not be available in your area. Click [here](#) to contact NYDP about your specific situation, and we will do our best to find relevant information.

### **1: Making the Decision to Get Tested**

Barrier: Many assessments are only done over the phone, which can be difficult for those who have hearing loss, those who have difficulty speaking, and those who are non-verbal.

Alternative: Call Telehealth Ontario's toll-free TTY number at 1-866-797-0007. TTY enables people who are deaf, hard of hearing, or speech-impaired to communicate over the phone through text messages. It can be used with both landlines and cell phones.

When you call, a Registered Nurse will ask you to answer questions so they can assess your health problem and give you advice that is specific to your case. Telehealth Ontario nurses will direct you to the most appropriate level of care or may put you in contact with a health professional who can advise you on your next steps. This service is provided in both English and French with translation support for more than 300 languages. This service is free for everyone and completely confidential.

### **2: Booking an Appointment to Get Tested**

Barrier: Making a phone call to schedule an appointment.

Alternative: Many hospitals and testing centres have online booking! Search all testing locations here: <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/assessment-centre-locations>.

### **3: Getting to the Testing Centre**

Barrier: If you have symptoms of COVID-19, you should not go on the bus. There is a lack of access to accessible or convenient transportation for people who are unable to drive.

Alternative: If you can afford a taxi or if you know someone who can drive you, you can ride in the back seat with the windows down and a mask.

### **4: Being Exposed to the Virus at the Testing Centre**

Barrier: Having a disability alone does not put you at higher risk for getting COVID-19 or having severe illness if you do get it. However, some people with disabilities might be at a higher risk of infection or severe illness because of their age, underlying medical conditions or the nature of their disability could put them at greater risk of being exposed and acquiring the infection.

Alternative 1: Contact your local hospital or testing centre and ask about an accommodation plan. Hospitals and testing centres should be able to accommodate people with disabilities. The Government of Canada suggests that this plan could include: accessible parking, ramps, the option to skip the lineup, the option to have a private room for those with disabilities, the option to conduct the test in the car, noise and light sensitivity considerations, and saliva tests rather than the NP swab that goes in the nose. The government says the plan should also include information that ensures essential care, support, sighted guides, interpreters, and friends can remain with a person during their time at the assessment centre and that information is provided in a functionally, multilingual and culturally appropriate way.

Alternative 2: In late October, it was announced that roughly 100, 000 rapid COVID-19 tests will be sent to remote communities and in outbreak situations in the near future. This involves health departments going to houses in teams with personal protective equipment. Contact your local health unit to see if this is an option for you.

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Even if you are not sure if it is a coronavirus cough or just a normal cough, if you have any symptoms, self-isolate until you are symptom-free for 24 hours. If you have no known contact with COVID-19, the recommended self-isolation period is 10 days long. If you know you have been in contact with someone who has the virus, or if you have been alerted by the app, then the recommended self-isolation period is 14 days. When doing this, be sure to self-isolate from family members and other people within the household. Sleep in a different area and keep the windows open for proper ventilation.

Sources:

<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/disability-barriers.html>

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/guidance-documents/people-with-disabilities.html>

<https://www.ontario.ca/page/get-medical-advice-telehealth-ontario>

[https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/entry/ontario-rapid-covid-tests\\_ca\\_5f931c90c5b6481d48fd2a82](https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/entry/ontario-rapid-covid-tests_ca_5f931c90c5b6481d48fd2a82)