

Patient Updates

Dec 31, 2021,

Dear Patients,

Yesterday the province announced some significant changes to self-isolation requirements and testing eligibility due to the Omicron surge. High case counts, limited testing capacity, and evolving guidance are changing our approach.

Key messages:

- if you have symptoms, you can presume you have COVID-19
- most people do not need a COVID-19 test to confirm their diagnosis. COVID-19 tests are now being reserved for high-risk settings and high-risk individuals
- there are important changes to isolation guidance that mean some people will only need to isolate for 5 days
- household contacts of people who have symptoms also need to self-isolate
- Two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine continue to provide excellent protection against severe disease for those with healthy immune systems. Most people with 2 COVID-19 vaccines and healthy immune symptoms will have milder symptoms if they get COVID-19.
- 3 doses of a COVID-19 vaccine provide more protection from getting and transmitting the Omicron variant than 2 doses. All Ontarians 18+ are eligible for a 3rd dose 84 days after the 2nd dose (see [here](#))

Below is some more detailed information on what to do if you experience COVID-19 symptoms and when to reach out to us.

What should I do if I have symptoms of COVID-19?

COVID-19 causes a range of symptoms that vary from person-to-person and include new or worsening:

- Fever > 37.8° C and/or chills
- Cough
- Trouble breathing
- Decrease or loss of smell or taste
- Headache

- Very tired, sore muscles and joints
- Nausea, vomiting and/or diarrhea
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Sore throat

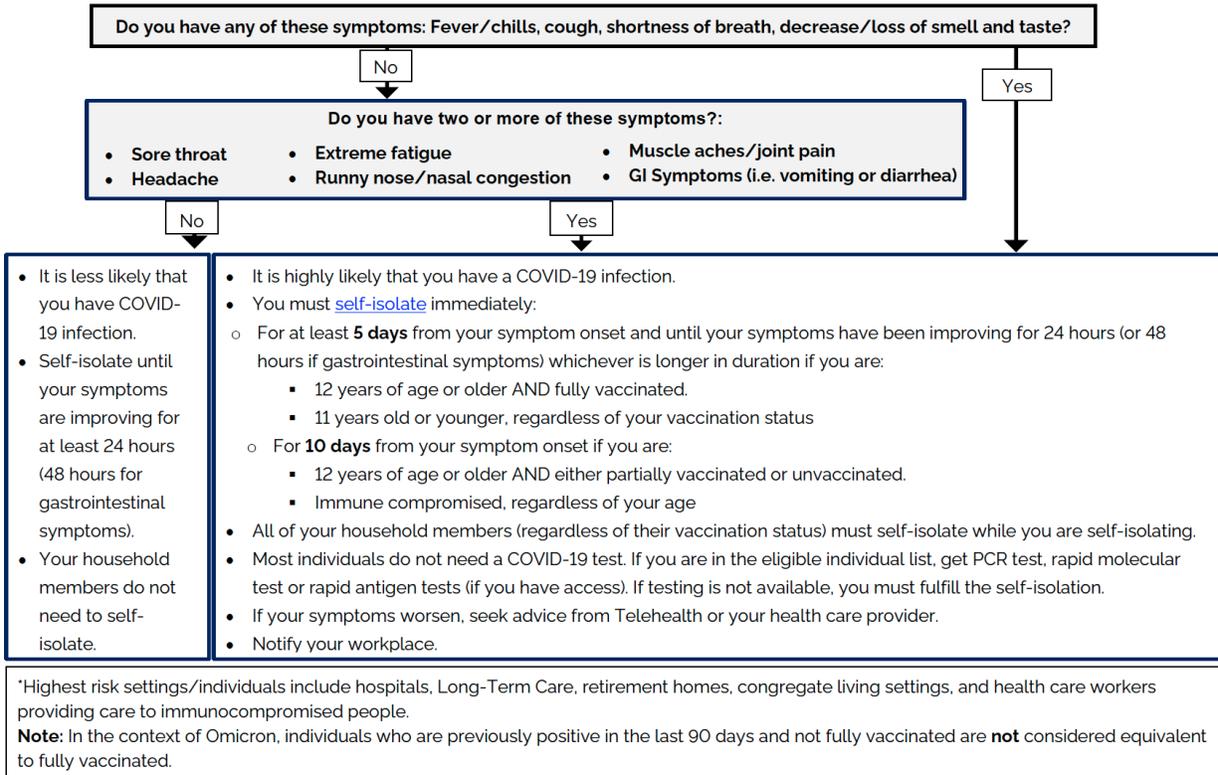
The number of people right now with COVID19 infection is so high that **if you are experiencing any of these symptoms you should assume you have COVID19 infection even if you are fully vaccinated.**

How long do I need to self-isolate?

Factors such as your age, your vaccination status, and your health status will determine how long you need to self-isolate. Please note **all household members should also self-isolate** if someone in the home has covid-19, regardless of whether or not they have symptoms. This chart below provides detailed information on what to do if you have symptoms.

You have symptoms and are concerned you may have COVID-19. Now what?

This guidance does not apply to individuals who live, work, volunteer or are admitted in a highest risk setting*



You can also use this on-line [self-assessment](#) for instructions on self-isolation and testing.

What about COVID19 testing?

Provincial guidance on who is eligible for a PCR test has changed. **Most people do not need a COVID test to confirm their diagnosis.** COVID tests are now being reserved for high-risk settings (e.g. people who live or work in congregate settings, long-term care homes, hospitals etc) and high-risk individuals (e.g. those 70 and over, people who are immunocompromised, people who are very ill, people who are underhoused or homeless, Indigenous people).

If you have access to a Rapid Antigen Test (RAT), you can use this to test yourself. However, if you have any of the above symptoms, a negative RAT does

not mean that you do not have COVID. You should still isolate from the start of your symptoms.

Please note that we do not have any rapid antigen tests available in our clinics, and we are not scheduling appointments in the clinic for COVID-19 testing.

What should I do if I test positive on a home Rapid Antigen Test (RAT)?

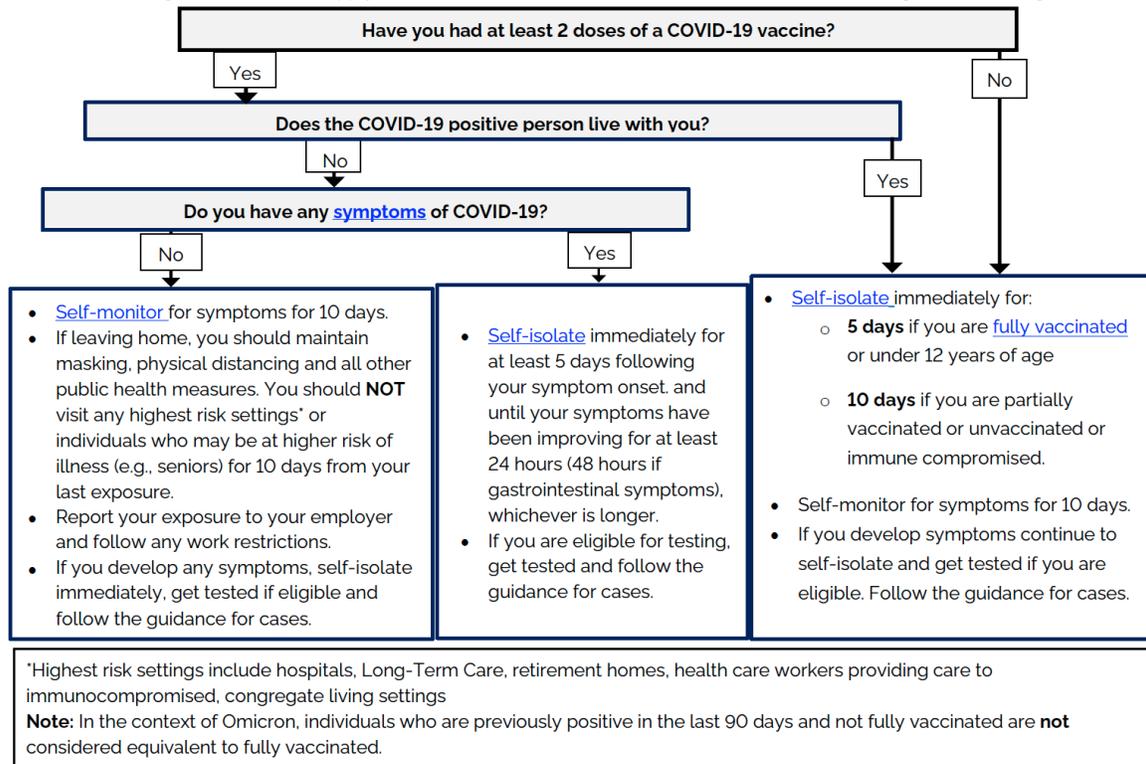
If you test positive on a RAT, with or without symptoms, you should assume you have COVID-19 and self-isolate. A positive RAT at this time does not need to be confirmed with a PCR test, unless you meet the new provincial criteria for testing. Consider taking a picture of the positive RAT (labelled with your name and date) for your records.

What if I have been exposed to someone with COVID-19?

The chart below can help you decide what to do if you have been exposed to someone has COVID-19 (e.g. because they tested positive on a RAT or PCR test OR because they have symptoms).

You've been exposed to someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 on PCR, rapid molecular, or rapid antigen test. Now what?

This guidance does not apply to individuals who live, work, volunteer or are admitted in a highest risk setting*



Am I eligible for treatment for COVID-19 if I have or get symptoms?

Most people will recover from COVID-19 using the same home remedies available for the common cold and/or influenza, including lots of rest, plenty of fluids and use over the counter medications for sore throats, body aches, headaches and fever. For resources on how to manage symptoms at home, please review [Toronto Public Health's website](#).

Selected **higher-risk individuals** with COVID-19 should be considered for early treatment options, in consultation with their health care team. Please call us to discuss potential need for treatment if you have a PCR confirmed diagnosis of COVID-19, are **over the age of 70** (50 yrs if First Nations, Inuit or Metis), and have any of the following conditions:

- Obesity (BMI \geq 30)
- Dialysis or stage 5 kidney disease
- Diabetes
- Cerebral Palsy
- Intellectual Disability
- Sickle Cell Disease
- Receiving active cancer treatment
- Solid organ or stem cell transplant recipients

Feeling sick with COVID-19 can also make it difficult to manage pre-existing medical conditions, such as asthma or mood symptoms. Please call us at any time if you need help managing any medical conditions while isolating at home with COVID-19.

If I have symptoms or test positive for COVID-19 (either PCR test or RAT), when should I call my health care team?

Tracking your symptoms of COVID-19 can help you and your care team determine whether a clinic or hospital visit is needed. See our [symptom tracker handout](#) to help you identify and track your symptoms.

Please call us and specify that your concern is urgent if you:

- Have new or worsening discomfort in your chest
- Have new or worsening trouble breathing
- Have increasing or significant fatigue
- Start feeling better and then get worse again (especially 5-8 days after the start of your symptoms)
- Are feeling lightheaded or dehydrated
- If you have a pulse-oximeter at home and your oxygen level drops by 3% from usual or is below 93% at any time
- If you are having challenges self-isolating because you cannot access food or other essential supports

Please go to your closest emergency room or dial 911 (or ask a family member/friend to dial 911) if you are experiencing any of the following symptoms:

- Severe chest pain
- Severe shortness of breath

- Continuous vomiting and inability to drink any fluids
- Serious trauma or injuries (i.e., bleeding that won't stop, deep cuts, broken bones)
- Sudden loss of vision
- Sudden onset weakness of the face or arm/leg
- Sudden inability to walk or talk

Due to the high volume of calls, please do not call to just to report a positive RAT or PCR if you are not at higher-risk (see above), have mild symptoms and can self-isolate. This will allow our team to be available to address other health care concerns and any urgent COVID related concerns for those who need it.

I'm worried with everything going on. How can I protect myself?

We know this is a challenging time for many. Now, more than ever, adhering to [public health measures to reduce spread](#) is important. Vaccination continues to provide excellent protection against severe disease. All adults 18+ are eligible to receive a 3rd dose 84 days after their 2nd dose. Please book the vaccine dose you are eligible for using the [provincial booking system](#).

Take care and be well,
SMHAFHT Leadership Team