

PRIORITY AND UNIVERSAL TESTING FOR STAFF & PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

Diagnostic testing is a critical part of confronting, delaying, and stopping the spread of COVID-19. [Federal/Provincial/Territorial \(F/P/T\)](#) and local Public Health Authorities (PHAs) across Canada provide direction to communities on COVID-19 testing. The [Public Health Agency of Canada \(PHAC\)](#) issued [guidance to F/P/T authorities](#) on laboratory testing, and has also asked [local PHAs to collaborate](#) with homelessness service providers on local plans and ensure alignment with F/P/T testing protocols.

Universal Testing

[Studies](#) completed in March and April 2020 in [Boston](#), San Francisco, and Seattle demonstrate the rapidity with which COVID-19 can be widely transmitted in service settings and suggest that universal testing, as opposed to testing based on symptoms, is the best strategy for identifying and mitigating spread among homeless populations. On July 1, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) directed communities to consider initial and regular universal testing in shelters and encampments even for asymptomatic individuals without known exposure, as these approaches may limit the spread of COVID-19. However, as it is unknown if entry testing for homeless service sites and encampments provides any additional reduction in transmission beyond other preventative measures, CDC did not recommend entry testing for shelters or encampments.

Access the [National Health Care for the Homeless Council's brief on universal testing](#) for operational strategies, frequency of testing, common challenges, and actions for successful universal testing.

The CAEH has conducted several [COVID-19 surveys](#) throughout the pandemic with communities connected to [Built for Zero Canada](#) or the [Training and Technical Assistance Program](#). Results from a [recent survey](#) conducted on June 22 indicate that 29% (9 communities) conducted universal testing in shelters in the preceding two weeks, and 6% (2 communities) did so in encampments. Several communities have actioned some form of universal testing in shelters, including Hamilton, ON, Calgary, AB, Windsor, ON, and Halifax, NS.

Priority Testing

F/P/T PHAs continued to announce changes in who would be prioritized for COVID-19 testing as their approaches evolved. A few provinces called for priority testing for shelter staff and residents in March and early April. As of June 30, most provinces now offer testing to anyone with symptoms.

Results from a [CAEH COVID-19 survey](#) conducted on April 27 indicate that 74% of participating communities (31 in total) have prioritized testing for symptomatic individuals experiencing
































































































homelessness, 16% for asymptomatic individuals, 61% for symptomatic shelter staff, and 16% for asymptomatic shelter staff.

Testing by Province

The following F/P/T PHAs have included symptomatic shelter residents or staff in priority testing or have begun universal testing in some shelters at the local level. Please see Table 1 for groups that have been identified, at one time or another, as priorities for COVID-19 testing by province.

- **Ontario** – [Testing available for anyone with at least one symptom](#) of COVID-19 as of June 2. Priority testing for symptomatic shelter staff, volunteers, and residents. Universal testing in some shelters.
 - April 1 – [Ministry of Health’s COVID-19 Guidance for Homeless Shelters](#) – Page 6
 - April 10 – [Enhanced testing strategy announcement](#) including reference to shelters
 - May 28 and June 2 – [COVID-19 Provincial Testing Guidance for specific settings](#)
- **Alberta** – Testing anyone with or without symptoms as of June. [Priority testing](#) was previously available for symptomatic shelter staff. Universal testing in some shelters.
 - April 5 – [Testing criteria expanded to include shelter workers](#)
 - April 13 – [Self-assessment for shelter workers](#)
 - April 29 – [Alberta Health Services COVID-19 Scientific Advisory Group](#) recommends universal testing for residents and staff in shelters and similar agencies in the context of an outbreak, cluster, or several linked cases under public health review
- **Manitoba** – [Testing anyone](#) with symptoms of COVID-19 as of June 2, 2020. Priority testing was previously available for congregate settings including shelters.
 - April 8 – [Screening tool](#) specifically identifies those who live or work in a shelter
- **New Brunswick** – Not a clear priority but shelter staff are listed in self-assessment.
 - [April 7](#) and [April 13](#) – Testing expands but shelters are not specifically mentioned
 - April 14 – [Self-assessment](#) specifically identifies those who work in shelters and are symptomatic
- **Newfoundland** – Not a clear priority but shelter staff are listed in self-assessment.
 - April 14 – [Self-assessment](#) specifically identifies those who work in shelters and are symptomatic
- **British Columbia** – [Testing anyone](#) with symptoms as of June 18. Priority testing was previously available for symptomatic shelter residents or those with unstable housing.
 - April 23 – [Ministry of Health’s Testing Guidelines for British Columbia](#)
 - May 5 – B.C. Interior Health advises to screen everyone in shelters daily and to react quickly to symptoms, as opposed to universal testing at this time
- **Saskatchewan** – Testing anyone with symptoms of COVID-19 as of June 2020. [Increased testing for symptomatic individuals who are experiencing homelessness](#) or living in other vulnerable settings.
- **Nova Scotia** – Priority testing for shelter residents and staff. Universal testing in some shelters.
 - [April 30](#) – Universal testing in Halifax shelters and expanding to other shelters with clusters

Table 1: Priority Testing for COVID-19 by Province as of June 30, 2020

	Symptomatic and ...													No symptoms		
	Testing Available for Anyone with Symptoms	Returning Travellers	Contact with COVID-19 Patient	Over 60, 65, or 70 Years of Age	Hospitalized with respiratory illness	Health Care Workers or Lab Workers	Long-Term Care Resident	Shelter Worker	Shelters	First Responders	Remote Location or On-Reserve	Part of a Cluster or Outbreak	Other Staff (Corrections or Long-Term Care Workers)	Travelled or had contact with COVID-19 patient	Universal Testing in Some Shelters Across the Province	Testing available for anyone, even without symptoms
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Priority Testing 

Conflicting or Changing Information 

Disclaimer: This document is a collection of resources and/or ideas compiled by the team at CAEH. Please follow [Public Health Agency of Canada guidelines on COVID-19](#) as the primary resource for all health-related concerns. CAEH will continue to update this resource as new information or ideas become available. Please refer to the CNH3 website Resources page at cnh3.ca/resources for additional information. If you have an idea or resource to share or are seeking further support, please contact us at info@caeh.ca.