



June 17, 2020

To Whom it May Concern:

**Re: PHO advice to businesses seeking to conduct private testing of asymptomatic employees**

As British Columbians begin to move carefully and thoughtfully through [BC's Restart Plan](#), businesses and industries are developing [COVID-19 Safety Plans](#) to guide safe operations in our new normal. Provincial guidance to support sectors to resume operations is under rapid development while the public health system continues to closely monitor the pandemic.

In response to our pandemic here in BC, we have implemented a range of measures and methods to slow and prevent the spread of COVID-19 and to test potential cases in a meaningful and deliberate way. Approaches to testing have differed in other jurisdictions that have experienced a more severe pandemic, with multiple outbreaks and sustained community transmission. BC's approach to testing has evolved and will continue to evolve based on epidemiology, testing capacity and methodology, and our growing understanding of the virus.

At this time, it is recommendation that **only people with symptoms or people otherwise identified by a health professional should be tested for COVID-19**. Routine testing of asymptomatic people **is not recommended in BC** (e.g., in schools, prior to surgery or other procedures, or as a condition of employment or for travel).

It is important to understand that testing can result in false positive and false negatives, particularly in asymptomatic people and in people who are very early on in the illness or who may be incubating the disease. Please note that serological tests for the virus that causes COVID-19 is recommended to focus on informing the public health response and for clinical research investigations only. The current state of scientific evidence does not support the use of serology for routine clinical care, infection control decision-making including guiding the use personal protective equipment (PPE) and adherence to physical distancing practices.

Under the *Public Health Act*, any positive test result must be reported to public health and this leads to public health follow up, including contact tracing and case management. If large numbers of false positive tests were to occur through routine testing of asymptomatic people, this could create a significant burden for the public health system and would provide little value in protecting your business and could impede our ability to protect the health of all British Columbians.

Regardless, we understand some businesses may decide to conduct private testing of asymptomatic employees as part of their business operations. It is critically important to remember that asymptomatic testing does not replace other measures to prevent transmission, including ensuring handwashing stations are stocked and available, monitoring of employees for symptoms and ensuring employees stay home when feeling ill, and providing space for safe physical distancing, putting up physical barriers when appropriate.

Businesses should be aware that private testing of asymptomatic individuals is against the guidance of public health, and as a result these businesses must establish processes and fund related infrastructure to meet the legislative requirements related to testing and public health follow up for a reportable health condition in BC. This may include hiring individuals to conduct contact tracing under public health direction for employees who test positive and ensuring employee contact details are available to public health in a timely way.

For private laboratory testing, businesses must, at their own expense, use an existing or establish a new private laboratory to conduct testing. Private laboratories must be accredited under the [Diagnostic Accreditation Program](#), operate per the stipulations set out under the *Laboratory Services Act*, align with provincial privacy and security requirements, and conform to related policies and regulations. Businesses that choose to establish a new private laboratory should be aware that the accreditation process can take several months and that a medical professional should submit a proposal to the Ministry of Health and Provincial Health Services Authority for review and approval.

For public health requirements, businesses must, at their own expense:

- Develop a reporting process to ensure all positive test results are submitted to local public health officials;
- Ensure all laboratory data is provided to the Provincial Laboratory Information Solution; and
- Follow the direction of public health to ensure that individuals with positive tests receive immediate follow-up.

I commend the many businesses that have worked hard to put necessary safety measures in place; your thoughtful planning will help everyone stays safe as we move through the next phases of BC's Restart Plan, and our pandemic in BC.

Sincerely,



Bonnie Henry  
MD, MPH, FRCPC  
Provincial Health Officer