

January 5, 2022

Dear Patients,

We are doing our best to keep up with the current demand and changes in healthcare. Please bring a kind and respectful approach to all interactions with our staff. We know you are tired of this pandemic, and we are too. Kindness goes a long way to helping us all have better days and being able to support you.

Last week, 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 evidence are changing our approach.

**Key messages:**

- If you have COVID like symptoms (listed below), 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)

**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:

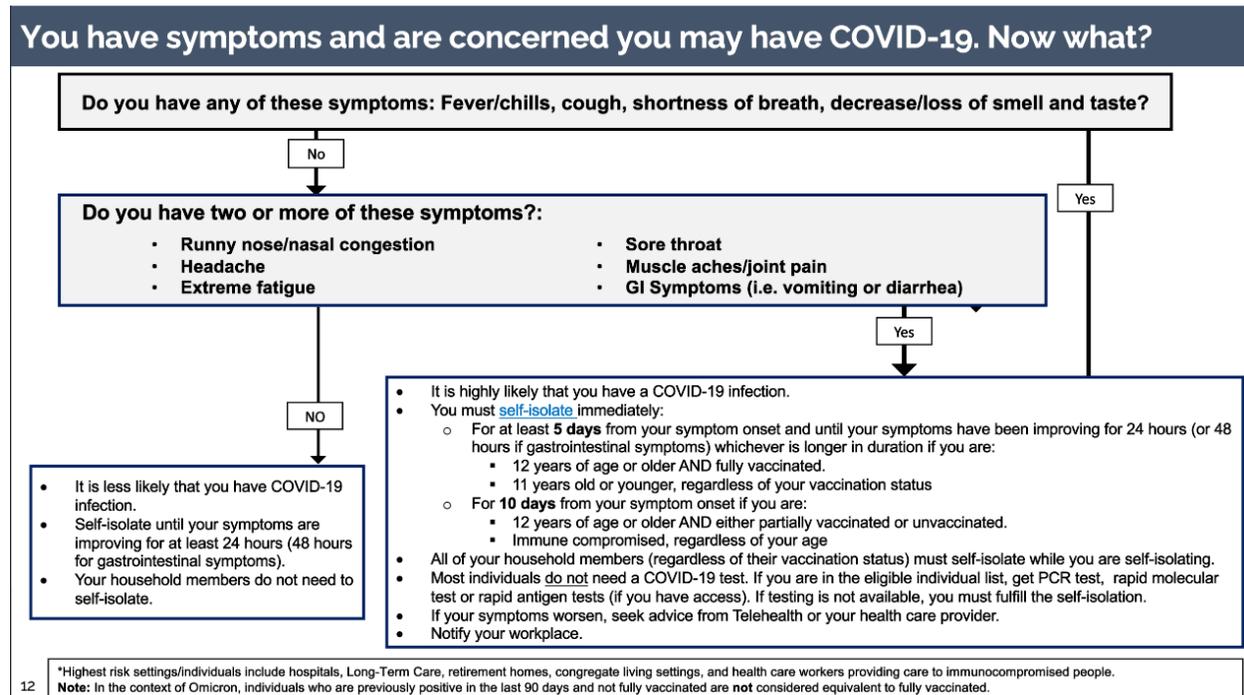
- Fever > 37.8° C and/or chills
- Cough
- Trouble breathing
- Decrease or loss of smell or taste
- Headache
- Very tired, sore muscles and joints
- Nausea, vomiting and/or diarrhea
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Sore throat

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.

<https://covid-19.ontario.ca/self-assessment/>

## 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.



## What about COVID-19 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.

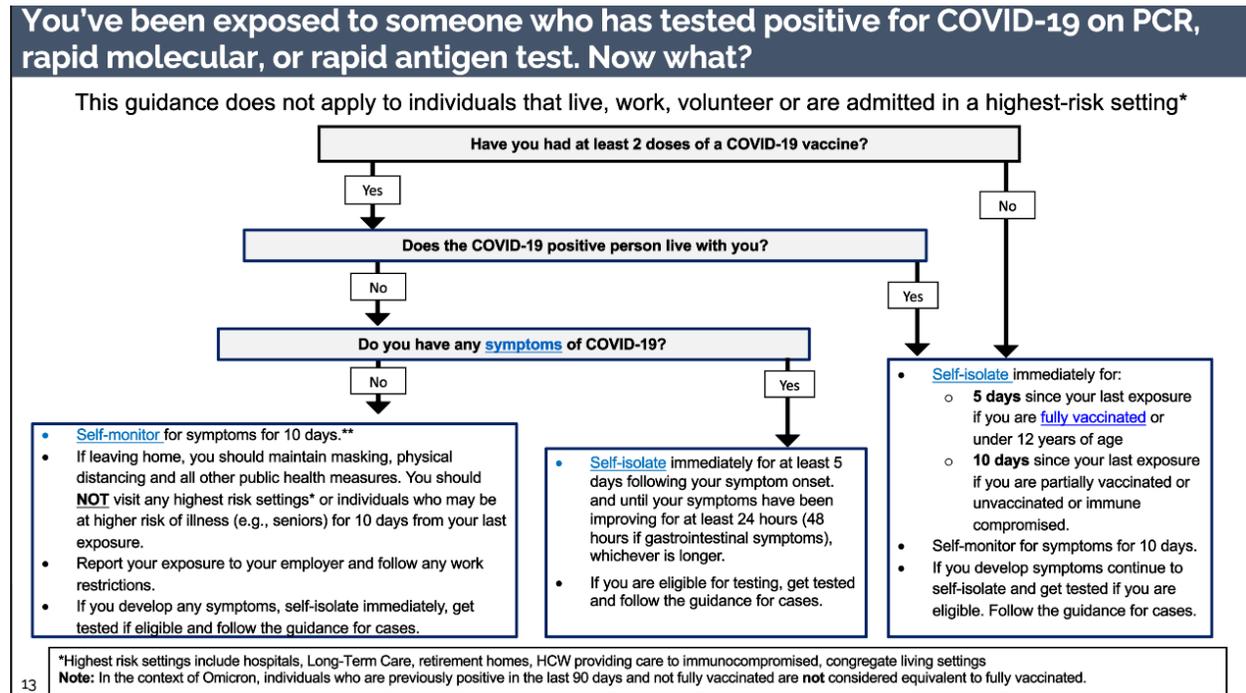
Please note that *we do not have any rapid antigen tests available in our clinics, and we are not scheduling appointments in the clinic for COVID-19 testing.*

## 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).



## Monitor Your Health

Please stay home and continue to monitor your health. Contact the office if you develop some of the following symptoms, are worsening or you feel you should be assessed by your physician.

- 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
- Have a pulse-oximeter at home and your oxygen level drops by 3% from usual or is below 93% at any time
- Are having challenges self-isolating because you cannot access food or other essential supports

**When to go to ER/Call 911:**

- 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

Please note that most COVID-19 illness are mild and manageable at home. Due to the high volume of calls, please do not call if you have mild symptoms, to report a positive RAT or PCR if you are not at higher-risk (as noted above). Please stay home, stay safe and self-isolate.

**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 Waterloo Regional booking system:

<https://www.regionofwaterloo.ca/en/health-and-wellness/covid-19-vaccination-pre-registration.aspx>

Take care and be well,

Your Healthcare Team at the Centre for Family Medicine