



DEC 08 2020

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MLA, NUNAKPUT

Oral Question 445-19(2): Self-Isolation for Medical Travel

This letter is in follow up to the Oral Question you raised on November 2, 2020 regarding Self-Isolation for Medical Travel.

Currently, the Northwest Territories (NWT) uses 2 types of devices for rapid COVID-19 testing in our hospital laboratories: GeneXpert and BioFire. Both devices are available in Yellowknife, but only the GeneXpert is also available in Inuvik. These use a technology called real-time polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR) which is the most accurate method of testing available. These devices must be used in a hospital laboratory.

The NWT has received two types of point-of-care COVID-19 tests that were recently approved by Health Canada: The Abbott Panbio and the Abbot ID Now. They will be used by nurses in health centres. These tests use a nasopharyngeal swab, which is a sample taken at the back of the nose. These tests are used for people who have symptoms.

Even though these tests are approved by Health Canada, the National Microbiology Laboratory must complete their assessment and provide guidance on their use. This work is currently underway by teams of national experts. We cannot use these devices until this work is done. We are preparing for rapid deployment to all health centres once this work is completed. While there is no definitive timeline it is a high priority given its planned use across all provinces and territories in Canada. My staff are updating me frequently on progress.

COVID-19 testing is focused on people with symptoms. We also conduct testing on some essential workers as an additional safety measure when they enter to the NWT. The regional health authorities offer essential workers COVID testing on arrival if their work requires them to work closely with NWT residents. Even if the test is negative they essential workers must still follow their worker's self-isolation plan. If someone has COVID-19, they may have a negative test but still have COVID-19 which could be transmissible, which is why continuing with their self-isolation plan is so important, and why essential service workers allowed to work must wear masks and socially distance in the workplace and continue to self-isolate when at home.

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I understand the hardships faced by people who need to travel out of the territory for medical reasons. Where possible we are offering more virtual care to reduce this need, but it is not always an option. Cases in Alberta and other parts of Canada are increasing and remain at very high levels. Even though it is difficult, we need to all continue to work together as Northerners to keep each other safe.

If anyone has symptoms, regardless of what community they live in, they can get testing. The swab is sent to Inuvik or Yellowknife and, as of November 6, 2020, on average the results are available within 24 hours from specimen collection. Swabs from communities are given high priority to speed up their results.

Please continue to encourage your constituents to stay home if they have symptoms and to call their health centre for assessment. We expect to have more cases of COVID-19 in the NWT, but we can all help to keep it from spreading.

Thank you.



Julie Green
Minister of Health and Social Services

c Clerk of the Legislative Assembly

Legislative Coordinator
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