



COVID-19 Media Lines

COVID-19 Testing Study by McMaster HealthLabs, Air Canada and the Greater Toronto Airport Authority

Issue statement

On September 3, 2020, in a [joint news release](#), McMaster HealthLabs, Air Canada and the Greater Toronto Airport Authority (GTAA) announced the launch of a study to conduct voluntary COVID-19 testing on travellers arriving in Canada at the Pearson International Airport. The news release reported that the purpose of the research is to gather information on the effectiveness of various quarantine periods for travellers and that participants would be advised their test results confidentially within 48 hours. Similar pilots are [reportedly](#) underway at international airports, including Heathrow, Charles de Gaulle and Tokyo Haneda. [Pilots](#) at other Canadian airports are in development.

On August 28, 2020, Dr. Tam mentioned that Canada was looking at options to reduce restrictive measures at the border, including the possibility of testing.

Key messages

- Our top priority is the health and safety of Canadians. To minimize the risk of new travel-related cases of COVID-19 within Canada, we are continuing to enforce border measures, including a mandatory 14-day quarantine or self-isolation period for travellers upon entry into Canada.
- The mandatory quarantine or self-isolation period after travel abroad is one of our core public health measures that have been shown to be effective at reducing the importation and spread of COVID-19.
- Under the Emergency Order in effect, receiving a negative test result does not exempt travellers from any of the requirements, including the mandatory 14-day quarantine.
- Border measures, including restrictions, health and body temperature screening prior to boarding of flights to Canada, and the mandatory quarantine, are part of the Government of Canada's multilayered strategy. All travellers entering Canada will continue to be screened for signs and symptoms of COVID-19.
- The Government of Canada is actively exploring options for testing travellers upon entry into Canada. In support, the Public Health Agency of Canada is continuing to review the latest available evidence on the use of testing to facilitate border measures.
- Protecting the health of Canadians means that any changes to border measures, including testing and quarantine requirements, must be supported by solid



scientific evidence.

- The Public Health Agency of Canada is continuing to work with the scientific community, including testing laboratories, to explore new partnership opportunities.

On the study by McMaster, Air Canada and the GTAA

- The Government of Canada is aware of the work undertaken by Air Canada in partnership with McMaster University and the Greater Toronto Airport Authority.
- The Public Health Agency of Canada is in talks with McMaster HealthLabs to ensure that researchers adhere to the Government of Canada's public health approach.
- Protecting the health of Canadians means that any changes to border measures, including testing and quarantine requirements, must be supported by solid scientific evidence.
- Receiving a negative test result through voluntary participation in the study by McMaster University, Air Canada and the GTAA does not exempt travellers entering Canada from any of the requirements, including the mandatory quarantine.

Q&As

Q1: Why do people who test negative still have to quarantine?

We know that COVID-19 cannot always be detected at every stage of the disease.

When an infected person has a low viral load (which can happen at the onset of illness or during the recovery stage), the test can return a false negative result. In other words, the person could be carrying the virus, but it would go undetected at this stage of the disease.

That is why, to minimize the risk of case importation, travellers entering Canada must follow the 14-day self-isolation or quarantine rule. As testing science evolves, we will continue to explore the role that testing could play in authorizing entry into Canada and lifting quarantine requirements.

Q2: How is the Government of Canada involved in this study?

The Public Health Agency of Canada and Health Canada are joining forces with McMaster HealthLabs for this study and are monitoring it very closely. The study will be independently reviewed by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research.