

Tests Checklist

Includes:

- ✓ Ordering tests
- ✓ Receiving test results
- ✓ Following-up on test results
- ✓ Special considerations:
 - for physicians practicing in walk-in clinics and Emergency Departments
 - when preparing for temporary absence from practice
- ✓ Tracking tests and results
- ✓ Communicating test results

General considerations for testing

About this Checklist

The OMA has developed a series of checklists to help you understand and implement the CPSO's *Continuity of Care* policies.

This checklist organizes the expectations related to tests from across all four *Continuity of Care* policies into common tasks. It lists key action items followed by the exact wording from the source policies. It also includes optional guidance from the CPSO's *Continuity of Care: Advice to the Profession* document.

This checklist is not intended as a substitute for reading the CPSO *Continuity of Care* policies in full.

Additional Advice to the Profession from the CPSO

Generally, any physician who determines that a test is needed is responsible for ordering that test, tracking the results, and managing any follow-up stemming from that test. By ordering tests that they themselves have deemed necessary, physicians ensure that patient care is not unnecessarily delayed, and that their colleagues are not required to receive results or manage care that falls outside their scope of practice.

Sometimes, physicians in the patient's circle of care may be able to accept responsibility (i.e., tracking and/or follow-up) for a test ordered by another physician, but the receiving physician has to agree to accept responsibility for the test.

Specific situations:

Tests related to incidental findings by a specialist

If during the course of an assessment, a specialist makes an incidental finding unrelated to the consultation (including abnormal lab or imaging tests) they will need to use their professional judgment to determine what is appropriate, taking into account the clinical significance of the finding and the timeliness of the required follow-up.

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If a test result is urgent, the specialist needs to communicate the result to the patient and take steps to arrange for timely follow-up. If a result is not urgent, the specialist needs to inform the patient of the finding and advise them to follow-up with their family physician.

Tests recommended by an e-consult physician

Physicians who provide e-consult services may not assess patients directly but might recommend that a test be ordered. In these cases, the physician seeking advice from the e-consultant physician would order the test and follow-up on the results.

Non-urgent tests recommended as a result of urgent or episodic care

In some situations, physicians might provide urgent or emergent episodic care, such as in an emergency department. Any recommendations for additional non-urgent investigations that fall outside of the acute care being provided are not generally the responsibility of the physician providing the urgent or emergent care.

Ordering Tests

Educate patients about the tests you order for them

- When ordering a test, physicians **must** inform patients of the significance of the test, the importance of getting the test done (in a timely manner, as appropriate), and the importance of complying with requisition form instructions. (*Managing Tests*, 21)

Include your professional contact information on test requisitions

- Physicians **must** include their professional contact information when ordering a test, writing a prescription, or making a referral and must provide relevant coverage contact information directly to other health-care providers (e.g., laboratories, diagnostic facilities) where it is appropriate to do so. (*Availability in Coverage*, 5)



Additional Advice to the Profession from the CPSO

If you are not the patient's primary care provider, it is generally good practice to copy the patient's primary care provider on a test requisition so they are aware of the tests ordered and the results; however, they would have no additional responsibilities in regard to the tests or results, unless there is reason to believe that a clinically significant test result has not been followed-up on.

Tracking Tests and Results

Make sure you have a test results management system

- In order to ensure appropriate follow-up on test results can occur, physicians **must** have an effective test results management system that enables them to:
 - a) record all tests they order;
 - b) record all test results received;
 - c) record that all test results received by physicians have been reviewed;
 - d) identify patients who have a high risk of receiving a clinically significant result, and critical and/or clinically significant test results; and
 - e) record that a patient has been informed of any clinically significant test results and the details of the follow-up taken by the physician. (*Managing Tests*, 1)
- Physicians who are not responsible for choosing the test results management system **must** be satisfied that the system in place has the capabilities listed above. (*Managing Tests*, 2)



Additional Advice to the Profession from the CPSO

A “critical test result” is one where the result is of such a serious nature that physicians may be required to make immediate patient management decisions. The Ontario Association of Medical Laboratories’ *Guideline for Reporting Laboratory Test Results* sets out the criteria for how labs define a critical lab result and the necessary steps labs must take in response. If in receipt of a critical result, the labs will call clinicians 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to report the result to facilitate prompt medical intervention if required. For more information on how critical test results are defined, consider reviewing the following resources:

- The Ontario Association of Medical Laboratories’ [Guideline for Reporting Laboratory Test Results](#).
- The Canadian Association of Radiologists’ [Communication of Diagnostic Imaging Findings](#).

Additional Resources

The CMPA offers a workshop designed to help physicians build a reliable follow-up system for test results in their practice.

For more information, visit the CMPA’s Workshop: [Test Results Follow-Up](#) web page.

Track the receipt of test results for patients who have a high risk of receiving a clinically significant result

- For patients who have a high risk of receiving a clinically significant test result, physicians **must** track their test results when they are not received when expected. (*Managing Tests*, 3)
- Physicians **must** either personally track test results or assign this task to others. (*Managing Tests*, 5)

Use your professional judgement to determine whether receipt of other test results needs to be tracked

- For patients who are not at high risk of receiving a clinically significant test result, physicians must use their professional judgement to determine whether to track a test result. In making this determination, physicians must consider the following factors:
 - a) the nature of the test that was ordered,
 - b) the patient’s current health status,
 - c) if the patient appears anxious or has expressed anxiety about the test, and
 - d) the significance of the potential result. (*Managing Tests*, 4)
- Physicians **must** either personally track test results or assign this task to others. (*Managing Tests*, 5)

Receiving Test Results

Ensure that critical test results can be reviewed and acted upon if necessary at all times

- Physicians **must** ensure that critical test results can be received and reviewed at all times, including outside of regular office hours and during temporary absences from practice, and that appropriate steps can be taken to notify patients if immediate emergency intervention is required. (*Availability and Coverage, 11*)

Tell the lab or diagnostic facility if you receive a test result in error

- Physicians who receive a critical or clinically significant test result in error (e.g., same or similar name or contact information) **must** inform the laboratory or diagnostic facility of the error. (*Managing Tests, 18*)

Communicating Test Results

Use ‘no news is good news’ strategies appropriately

- Physicians **must** only use a ‘no news is good news’ strategy for managing test results if they are confident that the test result management system in place is sufficiently robust to prevent test results from being missed and that no news really means good news. (*Managing Tests, 14*)
- Physicians **must** use their professional judgment to determine when a ‘no news is good news’ strategy is appropriate in each instance and must consider the following factors in making this determination:
 - the nature of the test that was ordered,
 - the patient’s current health status,
 - if the patient appears anxious or has expressed anxiety about the test, and
 - the significance or implications of the potential result. (*Managing Tests, 15*)

Tell patients if you are using a ‘no news is good news’ strategy and provide them with options to find out their test results

- Physicians **must** inform patients as to whether they are using a ‘no news is good news’ strategy and must tell patients that they have the option to personally contact the physician’s office or make an appointment to come into the office to hear their results. (*Managing Tests, 16*)

Communicate clinically significant test results to patients in a timely and appropriate manner

- When in receipt of a clinically significant test result, physicians **must** always communicate the test result to their patient and **must** do so in a timely manner. (*Managing Tests, 7*)
- For test results that are not clinically significant, physicians **must** use their professional judgment to determine whether to communicate a test result, and if doing so, when to communicate the test result. (*Managing Tests, 8*)
- Physicians **must** use their professional judgment to determine how to best communicate a test result; for example, over the phone or, at the next appointment. In making this determination, physicians must consider a variety of factors, including,
 - the nature of the test,
 - the significance of the test result,

- c) the complexity and implications of the test result,
- d) the nature of the physician-patient relationship,
- e) patient preferences/needs, and
- f) whether the patient appears anxious or has expressed anxiety about the test. (*Managing Tests*, 9)

Consider whether it is appropriate to have another health-care provider and/or non-medical staff member communicate test results to patients on your behalf

- Physicians **must** use their professional judgment to determine the circumstances where it makes sense for other health-care providers and/or non-medical staff to communicate test results. The factors physicians must consider include:
 - a) the nature of the test,
 - b) whether the patient appears anxious or has expressed anxiety about the test,
 - c) the significance or implications of the test result, and
 - d) whether communicating the test result would mean communicating a diagnosis. (*Managing Tests*, 10)

Document attempts to communicate test results to the patient in the patient’s medical record

- Physicians **must** ensure that all attempts made to either communicate the test result to the patient and/or to book a follow-up appointment to discuss a test result are documented in the medical record. (*Managing Tests*, 13)
- NOTE:** This includes attempts made by your staff on your behalf.

Respond to follow-up questions from the patient

- When relying on others to communicate test results, physicians **must** have a mechanism in place that enables them to respond to any follow-up questions that the patient may have. (*Managing Tests*, 11)

Communicate test results with other health-care providers if necessary

- Physicians in receipt of a test result **must** use their professional judgment to determine if it is necessary to share a patient’s test result with other relevant health-care providers whose ongoing care of the patient would benefit from that knowledge and, if sharing the test result, the timeliness with which to share it. The timeliness of the communication will depend on the degree to which the information may impact patient safety, including exposure to adverse clinical outcomes. (*Managing Tests*, 19)

Maintain patient confidentiality and privacy when communicating test results

- Physicians **must** ensure that the communication of test results adheres to their legal and professional obligations to maintain patient confidentiality and privacy. (*Managing Tests*, 12)

Following-up on Test Results

Take or delegate clinically appropriate action in response to critical and/or clinically significant test results

- When physicians receive a critical and/or clinically significant test result for a test that they have ordered, they **must** take clinically appropriate action. The timeliness of these actions will depend on the significance of the test result. Physicians can take clinically appropriate actions personally or they can assign or delegate this task to others. (*Managing Tests*, 17)

Special Considerations

When preparing for temporary absences from practice

Provide coverage information to other health-care providers and facilities when appropriate

- Physicians **must** include their professional contact information when ordering a test, writing a prescription, or making a referral and must provide relevant coverage contact information directly to other health-care providers (e.g., laboratories, diagnostic facilities) where it is appropriate to do so. (*Availability and Coverage, 5*)

Arrange for another health-care provider to i) receive and review all test results, and ii) if necessary, provide or coordinate follow-up care

- Physicians who will be unavailable during temporary absences from practice **must** make specific coverage arrangements with another health-care provider(s) to:
 - Receive, review, and provide or coordinate immediate care that is required during the temporary absence for all outstanding tests, and
 - Receive, review, and provide or coordinate immediate care that is required during the temporary absence for outstanding consultation reports. (*Availability and Coverage, 8*)

Ensure that critical test results can be reviewed and acted upon if necessary at all times

- Physicians **must** ensure that critical test results can be received and reviewed at all times, including outside of regular office hours and during temporary absences from practice, and that appropriate steps can be taken to notify patients if immediate emergency intervention is required. (*Availability and Coverage, 11*)

For physicians practicing in walk-in clinics and Emergency Departments

Arrange for appropriate follow-up on results for tests you have ordered

- Ordering physicians **must** ensure that follow-up on test results received occurs in accordance with provisions 7 through 17 [in the *Managing Tests* policy].
 - In certain health-care environments, the ordering physician may not be the same physician who receives the test result (e.g., in an emergency department or a walk-in clinic). In these situations, ordering physicians must either delegate, assign or otherwise ensure that there is another person that is responsible for coordinating the follow-up or that there is a system in place to do so. (*Managing Tests, 6*)
- Physicians practising in a walk-in clinic **must not** rely on the patient's primary care provider or another health-care provider involved in the patient's care to provide or coordinate appropriate follow-up for tests they have ordered or referrals they have made, unless the other providers have agreed to assume this responsibility. (*Walk-in Clinics, 7*)

The information provided in this resource is for informational purposes only and is not to be construed as legal advice. Physicians are ultimately governed by the CPSO policies which can be found at: <https://www.cpso.on.ca/Physicians/Policies-Guidance/Policies>. This resource is not intended as a substitute for reading the CPSO Continuity of Care policies in full.

About this Checklist

This checklist contains a summary of the expectations related to tests set out across the CPSO's four *Continuity of Care* policies. It is not intended as a substitute for reading the policies in full.

Tests Checklist Summary

Ordering Tests

- Educate patients about the tests you order for them
- Include your professional contact information on test requisitions

Tracking Tests and Results

- Make sure you have a test results management system
- Track the receipt of test results for patients who have a high risk of receiving a clinically significant result
- Use your professional judgement to determine whether receipt of other test results needs to be tracked

Receiving Test Results

- Ensure that critical test results can be reviewed and acted upon if necessary at all times
- Tell the lab or diagnostic facility if you receive a test result in error

Communicating Test Results

- Use 'no news is good news' strategies appropriately
- Tell patients if you are using a 'no news is good news' strategy and provide them with options to find out their test results
- Communicate clinically significant test results to patients in a timely and appropriate manner
- Consider whether it is appropriate to have another health-care provider and/or non-medical staff member communicate test results to patients on your behalf
- Document attempts to communicate test results to the patient in the patient's medical record
- Respond to follow-up questions from the patient
- Communicate test results with other health-care providers if necessary
- Maintain patient confidentiality and privacy when communicating test results

Following-up on Test Results

- Take or delegate clinically appropriate action in response to critical and/or clinically significant test results

Special Considerations

When preparing for temporary absences from practice

- Provide coverage information to other health-care providers and facilities when appropriate
- Arrange for another health-care provider to i) receive and review all test results, and ii) if necessary, provide or coordinate follow-up care
- Ensure that critical test results can be reviewed and acted upon if necessary at all times

For physicians practicing in walk-in clinics and Emergency Departments

- Arrange for appropriate follow-up on results for tests you have ordered