

Costs of active COVID-19 testing in Canada

Active testing for COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2) with reverse transcription polymerase chain reaction in at-risk populations "is feasible and affordable in Canada", say authors of a study published in the *CMAJ*.

Costs, human resources and the laboratory capacity required for active RT-PCR testing were assessed in five populations at increased risk of acquiring COVID-19 infection (hospital employees, community healthcare workers, long-term care facility residents, essential business employees, and schoolchildren and staff) in all provinces in Canada, compared with random surveillance testing.

Under the status quo, 41 751 RT-PCR tests per day were performed between 8 July and 17 July 2020 by 5122 personnel at a cost of \$2.4 million [2020 Canadian dollars] per day (\$67.8 million per month). Additional systematic contact tracing and testing was estimated to increase costs to \$78 million per month.

It was estimated that testing all hospital employees, community healthcare workers and long-term care facility residents, and essential business employees, would cost \$29.0 million, \$124.8 million, \$321.7 million per month, respectively, and require 1823, 11 074 and 25 965 additional personnel, respectively. Testing schoolchildren and staff would cost \$816.0 million over 6 weeks and require 46 368 additional personnel.

"Active testing strategies can identify a high proportion of people with SARS-CoV-2 infection and minimal or no symptoms, who are currently an important source of community transmission . . . This testing approach should be an integral component of a broad strategy to allow all Canadians to return safely to work and school," commented the authors.