

USE OF RAPID ANTIGEN TESTS (RATs)

Guidance for Use of RATs Distributed through Chambers of Commerce, Boards of Trade and Municipal Partners

March 23, 2022

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1. Reporting

- Chambers of Commerce and Boards of Trade are still asked to report on:
 - Total rapid antigen tests distributed
 - Total businesses and organizations receiving rapid antigen tests.
- Businesses and organizations receiving rapid tests are no longer required to report their results back to Chambers of Commerce and Boards of Trade.

2. Guidance on Performing a RAT

- Data suggests the performance of RATs may not be as good at detecting Omicron compared to previous variants, but swabbing the inside of the cheek and the back of the tongue or throat, as well as the nose, increases the sensitivity of rapid tests in detecting Omicron.
- The Ontario Science Advisory Table has posted video demonstrating the current recommendation on sample collection:

[COVID-19 Rapid Antigen Test: Sample Collection for Omicron - YouTube](#)

Note: This video begins by saying “there is no direct evidence” that performing a test with both throat and nasal swabs is better. Since the video was posted on February 7, 2022, more studies are showing this increases effectiveness. Current research shows that:

- Omicron is more likely to be detected in the throat
- Delta and other variants are more likely to be detected in the nasal cavity.

3. Use of RATs for Asymptomatic Screening

- How often should individuals be tested?
 - 3 or more times per week. (Previous recommendation: 2-3 per week.)

- Where can tests be performed?
 - Testing may be conducted at the workplace or at home prior to travel to the workplace.

- Who can be tested?
 - Employees, regular contractors, regular volunteers and regular visitors of local businesses and community organizations.
 - Owners of home-based businesses, including household members and others consistently in the space used for business.
 - Employees and students of private career colleges (post-secondary) required to be on campus.
 - Staff of private schools (K-12 schools).

- Are vaccinated individuals eligible for asymptomatic screening?
 - Asymptomatic screening can be implemented on a voluntary basis for all eligible individuals, regardless of vaccination status.
 - Vaccinated individuals are eligible for asymptomatic screening.
 - Note: Early on in the use of RATs, with limited data available, there was a concern that vaccinated individuals might trigger a higher rate of false positives than unvaccinated individuals. This has not been confirmed by the data now available.
 - A positive RAT should be considered confirmation of COVID, regardless of vaccination status.

- When can asymptomatic testing resume after recovering from COVID?
 - An individual with a confirmed COVID-19 on a RAT (or PCR test) may resume asymptomatic screening 30 days after a COVID-19 infection.

4. Use of RATs by Symptomatic Individuals

- A positive RAT is highly indicative that a symptomatic individual has COVID-19 and the individual is required to self-isolate. Members of their household do not need to self-isolate if:
 - Household members have previously tested positive for COVID-19 in the past 90 days
 - Household members that are 18+ and have received their booster dose
 - Household members that are under 18 years old and are fully vaccinated.

Household members should still take precautions for 10 days after exposure and:

- Self monitor for symptoms
 - Wear a mask and avoid activities where mask removal would be necessary
 - Not visit anyone who is at higher risk of illness,
 - Not visit or attend work in highest risk settings (unless they have previously tested positive in the past 90 days)
- If two consecutive RATs, separated by 24-48 hours, are both negative, the symptomatic individual is less likely to be infected, and the individual is advised to self-isolate until symptoms are improving for at least 24 hours (or 48 hours if gastrointestinal symptoms).

5. “One-off” Use of RATs

- One-off testing (e.g. before a social gathering) by people not experiencing COVID-19 symptoms and without a known exposure is generally not recommended.
- However, if a rapid antigen test is used in this way, it should be completed as close to the event as possible (e.g. ideally within a few hours of the event) and know that a negative result could be a false negative.

6. COVID Self-Isolation Guidelines

- Individuals who have symptoms of COVID-19 OR tested positive on a COVID-19 test should self-isolate immediately.
- If self-isolation is complete after 5 days, the following guidelines should be followed, regardless of vaccination status or age:
 - Do continue to wear a well-fitted mask in all public settings.
 - Do not visit anyone who is immunocompromised or at higher risk of illness.
 - Do not visit any highest-risk settings such as hospitals, long-term care facilities, retirement homes, First Nation elder care lodges, group homes, shelters, hospices, or correctional institutions.

These guidelines should be followed for 10 days from the onset of symptoms.

Isolation Period	Population
5 days after the date of positive test or symptom onset (whichever is earlier)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fully vaccinated individuals• Children under the age of 12
10 days after the date of positive test or symptom onset (whichever is earlier)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Individuals 12+ who are not fully vaccinated• Immunocompromised• Hospitalized for COVID-19 related illness
20 days after the date of positive test or symptom onset (whichever is earlier)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Severe illness (requiring ICU level of care)• Severe immune compromise

Eligible Workplaces & Individuals	COC/BOT Eligible	Notes
Business locations with 150 or fewer employees, regular contractors/visitors.	☑	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Primary target for test distribution via COCs/BOTs - Note: Not intended for one-off customer use. However, acceptable for consistent presence in a space (such as a client attending a week-long training session.)
Business locations with over 150 employees	☒	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Large businesses are able to order directly through Ontario Together (government) portal, Provincial Antigen Screening Program (Link provided below).
Home-based businesses	☑	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - These businesses are eligible to test all members of the household or others consistently in space used for business.
Non-profit organizations – employees, volunteers, regular contractors (150 or fewer individuals)	☑	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Organizations are eligible for COC/BOT pick up if the combined total of individuals to be tested is 150 or under.
Public schools – employees and students	☒	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Public schools receive tests through local school boards. - Contact email: PublicInquiries@ontario.ca
Private schools – employees, volunteers, or regular contractors (150 or fewer individuals)	COC/BOT Discretion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No longer required to test unvaccinated staff.
Private schools – students	☒	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ministry of Education has set up alternative distribution for private school students. - Contact email: FSB.PSIE@Ontario.ca
Private colleges – employees, volunteers, or regular contractors (150 or fewer individuals)	☑	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Eligible for COC/BOT pick up if combined <u>staff</u> and <u>student</u> total is 150 or under. - Larger institutions may set up direct delivery through the Ministry Colleges and Universities (MCU). If you receive a request above the 150 threshold, please redirect to the Ministry. - Contact email: pcc@ontario.ca
Private colleges – students	☑	
Licensed childcare – staff, volunteers, and regular contractors	COC/BOT Discretion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - As per the Nov. 15, 2021 stakeholder memo from the Ministry of Education, licensed childcare locations have been directed to request tests through a local school board. - Requests for additional information can be directed to: childcare_ontario@ontario.ca

Eligible Workplaces & Individuals	COC/BOT Eligible	Notes
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Some childcare locations continued to receive tests from COCs/BOTs after this change. - If the request does not put undo pressure on supply, COC/BOT may provide tests at its discretion.
Municipal Offices / Services	COC/BOT Discretion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Able to order directly through Ontario Together (government) portal, Provincial Antigen Screening Program (Link provided below). - If a small number of tests required, and the request does not put undo pressure on supply, COC/BOT may provide tests at its discretion.

7. Additional Resources

- Toronto Region Board of Trade: [Rapid Tests: When Your Business Should Use Them](#) (February 9, 2022)
- Ontario Ministry of Health (MOH): [Interim Guidance: Omicron Surge](#) (February 3, 2022)