

KEY MESSAGES ABOUT THE PROVINCIAL ANTIGEN SCREENING PROGRAM

Program Overview:

- The Provincial Antigen Screening Program is a program that allows employers in priority settings to add an additional safety measure in high-risk and essential workplaces, to help reduce the spread of COVID-19.
- Workplaces are a key setting to implement rapid testing; many people continue to go to work despite other, broader public health measures to limit the spread of COVID-19, and the nature of some workplaces may place employees at an increased risk of spreading COVID-19 within the workplace or to the vulnerable populations they work with.
- Through the program, rapid antigen point-of-care tests (POCTs) will be distributed to organizations in priority settings, to enhance existing routine screening measures for asymptomatic employees and other identified groups entering the workplace.
- Rapid antigen screening does not replace existing workplace infection prevention and control measures.
- Sectors have been prioritized for the Provincial Antigen Screening Program based on criteria of risk, vulnerability and criticality, and include:
 - All long-term care homes across the province
 - Retirement homes
 - Essential industries
 - Other congregate care and living settings
 - Education
 - Other essential services
 - Health sectors

Key Benefits of Participation:

- A key benefit of participating in the Provincial Antigen Screening Program is that rapid, on-site testing may facilitate the identification of an individual infected with COVID-19 infection in the workplace that regular screening protocols (e.g., symptom screening) might otherwise miss.
- It may therefore help prevent asymptomatic individuals from unknowingly spreading COVID-19 in the workplace and helps to break the chain of transmission for COVID-19.
- For employers participating in the program, the provincial government will provide the employers with the free rapid antigen POCT kits, dependent on available inventory.

How to Participate:

- Partner ministries may reach out to priority sectors targeted for deployment to confirm interest and participation. Organizations can apply to this program by responding directly to their ministry's invitation.
- Organizations who fall within the program scope and did not receive an invite can contact their respective ministries to inquire about participation in the Provincial Antigen Screening Program.
- For employers who aren't prioritized for participation in the program at this point in time, the province will continue to assess eligibility of settings based on risk, vulnerability, and criticality to Ontario's economy. The province will consider deploying additional rapid POCTs based on the available supply and overall pandemic response.
- Regardless of participation in the Provincial Antigen Screening Program, anyone who falls within the current Provincial Testing Guidance can continue to receive a free test for COVID-19 at assessment centres, participating pharmacies and community labs. Please visit [Ontario.ca/covidtest](https://ontario.ca/covidtest) to find a testing location and for eligibility criteria to be tested.

KEY MESSAGES ABOUT RAPID ANTIGEN TESTS

About Rapid Antigen Tests:

- A rapid antigen test (also known as a point-of-care test or POCT) can be performed anywhere (i.e., on-site, at the place of employment) by a health professional or trained individual and does not require shipping a specimen to a lab for processing.
- It takes approximately 15 minutes to yield results, and results can be processed concurrently, allowing for larger groups to be screened more quickly than other COVID-19 testing modalities.
- It is currently administered through a nasopharyngeal swab, combined swabbing of throat and both nares, deep nasal swabbing (both nares) or anterior nasal swabbing (both nares).
- Rapid antigen POCT are not a stand-alone measure for protecting your workplace; rapid point-of-care antigen tests are being used on asymptomatic individuals, who have passed routine screening. The rapid antigen POCT adds an additional layer of protection to potentially prevent a person with COVID-19 from entering the workplace who would have otherwise gone undetected.
- Anyone who is symptomatic, is a known close contact of someone with COVID-19 should not be tested with a rapid antigen POCT, and instead should go to their nearest Assessment Centre for a lab-based PCR test.

Interpreting Results from a Rapid Antigen Test:

- Available evidence indicates that frequent screening with rapid antigen POCT increases the chances of early identification of cases in otherwise asymptomatic individuals and mitigates the lower sensitivity of a single antigen POCT.
- Rapid antigen POCT are less sensitive and specific than lab-based PCR tests, meaning that results are not as accurate.
- As such, rapid antigen POCT may yield some false negative test results (i.e., a result that indicates the individual is not infected with COVID-19 when in fact they are), and to a lesser extent, some false positive test results (i.e., a result that indicates the individual is infected with COVID-19 when in fact they are not).
- Results should therefore be interpreted with caution, and employees should continue to adhere to the necessary COVID-19 infection prevention and control measures, such as appropriate distancing, use of PPE, and hand washing, to reduce the risk of infection.
- A positive result on a rapid antigen POCT is considered a preliminary positive and should be followed up with a laboratory-based PCR test to act as a confirmatory test within 24 hours. The individual who received a positive result on the rapid antigen test should isolate until the result of the lab-based PCR test is known.
- Nasopharyngeal (NP) swab is the specimen collection type with the highest sensitivity, but alternate specimen collection types are also acceptable, including a combined swab of throat and both nares, a deep nasal swab (both nares) or an anterior nasal swab (both nares). Most provincially-funded rapid antigen POCT come with a nasal swab.
- The level of accuracy between these alternate specimen types may not vary greatly; for example, in lab-based settings the Abbott Panbio™ NP swab kit records a sensitivity of 91.4%, whereas the Abbott Panbio™ Nasal Swab Kit records a sensitivity of 91.1%.
- Sensitivity recorded in real-world settings may be lower than in lab-based settings.

Antigen Test Types:

- Currently, provincially supported rapid antigen screening is being conducted using the Abbott Panbio™ test and BD Veritor™ test.
- As more rapid antigen technologies become Health Canada approved and available for use in the province, additional devices may be deployed as part of the Provincial Antigen Screening Program.
- All rapid antigen POCTs perform similarly i.e., all antigen tests detect specific proteins from the COVID-19 virus to screen and identify people who need further testing.
- Rapid antigen POCT types may have different considerations in terms of instrumentation and workflow.

KEY MESSAGES ABOUT PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

Program Implementation:

- Participating employers will have significant flexibility in the implementation of rapid antigen testing within their respective workplaces.
- The government is not being prescriptive about the operational decisions related to program implementation, so long as they adhere to the terms of the Provincial Antigen Screening Program agreement, including compliance with applicable provincial guidance.
- Sector specific policy or directives may further outline any required implementation parameters, including frequency of testing and populations to test.
- Participating employers who require additional onsite support to administer the Provincial Antigen Screening Program may choose to voluntarily enter into an agreement with a service delivery provider, at their own cost.
- Participating employers can also access a Provincial Antigen Screening Program Services Directory to find local service providers who can provide rapid antigen test administration.
- Training materials will be made available from Ontario Health in an online format and will include pre-recorded training modules and a suite of written materials.
- Participating employers are required to enter a small set of data on a weekly basis into a centralized reporting database. The province may, at its discretion, terminate an employer's participation in the program and stop supplying test kits to employers that fail to comply with reporting or other program requirements.

Overcoming Barriers to Implementation:

- The Ministry of Health has addressed a number of barriers to implementation expressed by early adopters of rapid antigen testing.
- Point-of-care tests, which includes rapid antigen tests, have been exempt from the *Laboratory and Specimen Collection Centre Licensing Act, 1990* ("LSCCLA").
- Any health professional or trained individual can perform rapid antigen screening, according to the manufacturer's instructions.
- Health professionals include both regulated and non-regulated health professionals.
- Health professionals or trained individuals performing a rapid antigen POCT may administer combined swabbing of throat and both nares, deep nasal swabbing (both nares) and anterior nasal swabbing (both nares). A nasopharyngeal swab may also be administered by physicians, nurse practitioners, or their delegate.
- Pursuing alternatives to nasopharyngeal specimen collection may have the advantage of:
 - Increasing the availability of testing as an option by allowing for a broad range of health care professionals to collect the specimen

PROVINCIAL ANTIGEN SCREENING PROGRAM: KEY MESSAGES

- Reducing the inconvenience or discomfort due to repeated nasopharyngeal swabs
- Improved adherence to screening programs
- Potential for more immediate and robust uptake of this test
- Specimen collection for antigen POCT may also be done by the person being tested (i.e., 'self-swabbing') if a trained individual is supervising the self-swabbing.
- Any individual supervising self-swabbing must consult the self-swabbing training resource developed by Ontario Health in collaboration with Public Health Ontario and ensure they have the appropriate knowledge, skills, and judgment to provide appropriate self-swabbing oversight, including how to operate the device, personal protective equipment (PPE) requirements, and how to safely dispose of biowaste.

Learnings from the Employer Rapid Antigen Screening Pilot:

- Employer pilots performed to date in workplace settings have indicated that most employers and employees felt an increased sense of protection and security in the workplace. Most employers felt that implementation went smoothly, and most employees had no concerns with participating.
- Overall, the number of positives detected was low relative to the number of tests performed, which demonstrates that the overall disruption to workplaces may be minimal, but that asymptomatic screening with rapid point-of-care antigen tests was able to find COVID-19 cases that otherwise would have otherwise missed by routine screening measures.