

PROVINCIAL TESTING STRATEGY & GUIDANCE

On August 27, 2021 the Ministry of Health, Testing Planning and Implementation, issued the following memo to inform of recent changes to the COVID-19 Testing Strategy and Guidance:

This memo serves to inform of recent changes to [COVID-19 Guidance: Considerations for Antigen Point-of-Care Testing](#) and the [COVID-19 Provincial Testing Guidance](#), as well as updates to the Provincial Antigen Screening Program (PASP) as a result of recent evidence-informed policy decisions.

Updates to Provincial Testing Guidance

Several updates have been recently made to [COVID-19 Guidance: Considerations for Antigen Point-of-Care Testing](#), to reflect advice on the use of rapid antigen screening tests, as well as to facilitate rapid antigen point of care testing as a result of vaccine policy mandates, including Directive #6, which was publicly announced on August 17th 2021. Key updates to this guidance include:

- *Antigen POCT is not recommended for individuals who are fully vaccinated.*
- *Frequency of antigen POCT of at least one time per week, and up to 2-3 times per week.*
- *Confirmatory testing is still required for a positive antigen POCT, and now can be done using a rapid molecular test (e.g., ID NOW) when rapid molecular tests can be reported into the Ontario Laboratories Information System (OLIS) as well as using laboratory-based PCR testing.*
 - *A positive result on a rapid molecular test following a preliminary positive on an antigen POCT would be considered a confirmed test result, whereas a negative result on a rapid molecular test following a preliminary positive on an antigen POCT would require confirmation with a laboratory-based PCR test.*
- *Self-screening at home has been enabled through two changes to guidance:*
 - *Voluntary, unsupervised self-swabbing has been enabled. Note that organizations may still elect to have a health professional or trained individual perform the test, and/or permit supervised self-swabbing.*

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- *Waste generated from at-home rapid antigen screening is exempt from guidance for disposal of test kits for organizations performing on-site workplace antigen screening programs, and instead, persons undertaking at-home rapid antigen tests should consult their local municipality's by-laws on the proper disposal of this waste to ensure it can be disposed of with the household trash.*

Additional changes have also been made to the [COVID-19 Provincial Testing Guidance](#)

- *Reduced eligibility for asymptomatic lab-based PCR testing for targeted groups. Remaining eligible individuals include:*
 - *Workers (including support workers), visitors (including care givers) and government inspectors of long-term care homes;*
 - *Temporary Foreign Workers for the purpose of international travel;*
 - *Individuals who identify as Indigenous;*
 - *Individuals, and one accompanying caregiver, with written prior approval for out-of-country medical services from the General Manager, OHIP;*
 - *Individuals who are travelling into remote/isolated First Nation and Indigenous communities for work purposes;*
 - *Pre-camp testing for campers (not all campers are children) and staff attending overnight summer camps (until September 6, 2021). Pre-camp testing for campers (not all campers are children) and staff attending overnight summer camps (2021) is available at pharmacies only.*
- *To support access to testing, less invasive specimen collection approaches should be used, to maximize test uptake.*

Provincial Antigen Screening Program Eligibility

Participation in PASP continues to be voluntary for sectors that do not have vaccine mandates in place. The updated [COVID-19 Guidance: Considerations for Antigen Point-of-Care Testing](#) recommends not conducting antigen screening for fully-vaccinated individuals. In practice, this means that regardless of vaccination status, an individual may still choose to participate in rapid antigen screening, and do not need to disclose their vaccination status to participate or not participate.

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All organizations with required antigen testing under a provincially-mandated vaccine policy, including Directive #6, are eligible to receive government-funded rapid antigen screening tests.

Businesses that wish to use rapid antigen tests to screen patrons (e.g., concert providers, businesses providing personal care services) are advised to privately procure tests for patron screening, and to use those tests in accordance with [COVID-19 Guidance: Considerations for Privately Initiated Testing](#).

Additional Resources

The Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health (OCMOH) has released the updated [COVID-19 Provincial Testing Guidance](#) and the [COVID-19 Guidance: Considerations for Antigen Point-of-Care Testing](#) to reflect the changes noted above.

PASP documentation is being updated to reflect these changes and will be circulated as soon as it's available. Updates to the [website](#) will also be made.

Anyone organization interested in receiving rapid antigen screening tests, as part of the PASP should visit: [Get free rapid tests | COVID-19 \(coronavirus\) in Ontario](#)

Key Contact Information

For questions about antigen point-of-care testing and/or the Provincial Antigen Screening Program, please contact the Ministry of Health by way of email to: Heather.Nichol@ontario.ca

For questions about the COVID-19 Provincial Testing Guidance or Directive #6, please contact the Ministry of Health, Emergency Operations Centre by way of email to: EOCOoperations.MOH@ontario.ca