
As of Dec. 31, 2021 a positive result from a rapid antigen test will no longer require a confirmatory PCR (Polymerase Chain Reaction) or Rapid Molecular Test. Also effective as of Dec. 31, 2021, PCR testing will only be available for individuals if they belong to groups identified in the Updated Eligibility for PCR Testing and Case and Contact Management Guidance in Ontario. Members from First Nation, Inuit and Metis communities and individuals travelling into these communities for work have been identified as eligible for the PCR test.

The Ontario Chief Medical Officer of Health (Dr. Moore) announced that under the province’s new testing guidelines the primary purpose of the rapid antigen tests (RATs), is to keep people safe in high-risk settings and sectors (e.g. hospitals and long-term care homes, by paramedics, in shelters, congregate care settings, as well as in First Nation and Indigenous communities and organizations). The RATs will be used to: test-to-work; test those without symptoms as screening; and used for people who are displaying COVID-19 symptoms. He also noted that rapid tests should not be used for “one-off” use (such as testing before social events) due to the risk of false negative results.

Individuals with a positive rapid antigen test should inform anyone they’ve been close to in a 48-hour period before any symptom onset or rapid antigen test result (whichever is earlier).

Individuals with any symptoms consistent with COVID-19 (such as a fever, and cough) are presumed positive for COVID-19 and do not need testing either through rapid
antigen or PCR to begin isolating. Self-monitoring/isolation guidelines should begin immediately.

Individuals with a confirmed COVID-19 diagnosis who are vaccinated, as well as children under 12 are now required to isolate for five days following the onset of symptoms. Their household contacts are also required to isolate with them. Isolation can end after 5 days if symptoms have improved for at least 24 hours and Public Health measures (masking and social distancing) are followed. Non-household contacts are required to self-monitor for ten days. Those who are unvaccinated, partially vaccinated or immunocompromised are required to isolate for 10 days. Individuals who work or live in high-risk settings are recommended to return to work after 10 days from their last exposure or symptom onset or from the date of diagnosis. Workers will have the opportunity to return to work after isolating for seven days with a negative PCR or rapid antigen test results.

The Ministry of Health will also be using RATs in education settings for symptomatic testing and screening and sending kits to sectors with mandatory vaccination policies or testing mandates. As mentioned above the limited supply of RATs is being prioritized for health care and high risk settings including First Nation communities. Communities can access these tests through the Provincial Antigen Screening Program (PASP). Indigenous Affairs Ontario is working with the Ministry of Health and Indigenous Services Canada to expedite and fulfill requests for tests by First Nation communities and organizations.

Access to the Provincial Antigen Screening Program is through the Ministry of Health’s website. Following the instructions below will ensure IAO is aware of your request in order to prioritize it.

1. Visit Provincial Antigen Screening Program to check your eligibility and apply.
2. Once you have confirmed your eligibility, you will need to apply to the PASP by providing your organization/community’s contact information and submit.
3. Once submitted, you will receive an email confirmation that you can proceed to order RATs through the E-Health Online Ordering Portal. You will need to identify the number of individual tests that you require. This is referred to as ‘eaches’ in the portal.
4. After you submit your order for RATs through the portal, please contact IndigenousTestKits@Ontario.ca to notify IAO of your request.

When placing your order, Indigenous communities and organizations are asked to:

- Identify orders as Indigenous requests in order to be prioritized
- Ensure information provided in the order is correct to be shipped and received in a timely manner
- Indicate the most immediate supply need for the rapid antigen tests until MOH is able to increase supply
Specifically, please carefully review:

A. **Shipping details** – note that shipping location must be a place of business. Residential addresses will not be accepted.

B. **Contact information**, including contact name, valid phone number and email address. Individual may be contacted to confirm the order, shipment and may be required to receive shipment. Please monitor phone and email for confirmation of request.

C. **Items ordered** – ensure that when asked “What will you be requesting today?” on E-Health Online Ordering Portal, item selected is “Rapid Tests”.
   - Please ensure that the correct amount of rapid antigen tests are ordered.
   - Total tests ordered should be estimated based on total number of individuals testing, and frequency of testing each week. For example, if you request 500 rapid tests for four weeks, this equals 500 individual rapid tests or ‘500 eaches’. The total kits shipped will be dependent on the brand of tests available to complete the order (i.e. some kits come in packs of 5, while other kits may come in packs of 2 etc..)

D. **Additional comments** – please include a description in the Additional Comments with details on how you plan to distribute the RATs, who they will be provided to and for what purpose.

Should you have any additional questions, please contact IndigenousTestKits@ontario.ca.

Please note that Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) requests can be made through the same E-Health Ontario portal used for RATs by selecting the PPE option when ordering.

Ontario is to receive 54.3 million tests from the federal government and has procured an additional 65 million RATs. RATs are to become more widely distributed to the public once adequate supply is available. [The federal government announced it will be sending some 140 million rapid antigen tests to the provinces this month.]

**Enhanced Vaccine Certificate with QR Code**

Starting January 4th, 2022, it is mandatory for individuals to use the enhanced vaccine certificate with QR code and for businesses to use the Verify Ontario app in settings where proof of vaccination is required. In order to download the enhanced vaccine certificate with QR code, your information must be captured in COVax. For those who did not consent to have their information captured in COVax, you can either contact the clinic where you receive the vaccine or another health service provider that has access to COVax to have your information uploaded into that system. Updated guidance information will be coming regarding the Enhanced Vaccine Certificate with QR code.

Provincial Developments:

*Impact of Omicron Variant on Hospitals*

- Ontario saw the highest number of people with COVID-19 in hospitals yet, some 2,472 people on Friday. This represents a 116 percent increase from this time last week when the number stood at 1,144 people. There are also 338 patients with COVID-19 in ICUs, up from 205 last Friday.
- Among those hospitalized, 1,327 patients are fully vaccinated, 441 are unvaccinated, 100 are partially vaccinated and over 600 have an unknown vaccination status.
- Sadly, more young children are being hospitalized. Public Health Ontario reported 51 children under four years old in hospital with COVID-19 on January 6th compared to 43 the day before.
- Tragically, two children under 10 years old have died from COVID-19 in the past two weeks. Ontario’s Chief Medical Officer of Health Dr. Moore noted that the "death of children is exceptionally rare from this virus."
- The head of the Ontario Hospital Association said that numerous hospitals are reporting a large number of staff absences due to COVID-19 and the demands and pressures on hospitals is expected to worsen.