



Rapid Antigen Screening Program Information Sheet

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What Is The Antigen Screening Program?

The Antigen Screening Program is a provincial program that allows employers in priority settings (long-term care homes, retirement homes, congregate living settings, schools, etc.) to add an additional safety measure in high-risk and essential workplaces, to help reduce the spread of COVID-19. Rapid antigen tests will be distributed to organizations in priority settings, to enhance existing routine screening measures for asymptomatic employees and other identified groups. SSHA is participating in this program, in partnership with TPH, as rapid antigen tests may allow for shelter settings to proactively identify cases of COVID-19 that may have otherwise been missed, supporting employee safety and business continuity in a variety of workplaces.

What is a Rapid Antigen Test?

A rapid antigen test (also known as a point-of-care test) can be performed anywhere and does not require shipping a specimen to a lab for processing. It is currently administered through a nasopharyngeal, nasal, deep nasal, or combined nasal and throat swabs and takes approximately 15 minutes to yield results. Deep nasal swabs can be self-administered under the supervision of a trained staff. Nasopharyngeal swabs will only be performed by trained medical staff.

What Are The Benefits of Participating In The Program?

Available evidence indicates that frequent screening with rapid antigen tests increases the chances of early identification of cases in otherwise asymptomatic individuals. It may therefore help prevent asymptomatic individuals from unknowingly transmitting the virus to other individuals in the workplace.

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 that regular screening protocols might otherwise miss. It may therefore help prevent asymptomatic individuals from unknowingly spreading COVID-19 in the shelter and helps to break the chain of transmission for COVID-19.

Who Can Participate in Rapid Antigen Screening?

SSHA will be prioritizing testing for new admissions to shelter and hotel programs.

What Training is Available for Staff?

Training materials are available from Ontario Health in an online format and includes a suite of written materials and pre-recorded training modules. Reviewing training materials will help build confidence and competence for those performing the testing and will assist your workplace in understanding program logistics and planning for implementation. Completing the training is required before sites begin piloting the rapid testing.

Should Individuals Who Have Been Vaccinated for COVID-19 Receive a Rapid Antigen Test?

Individuals who have received a COVID-19 vaccine, regardless of whether they received one or two doses, are still able to receive an accurate result from a rapid antigen test. Vaccinated individuals should not be excluded from rapid antigen screening initiatives, as it is unknown at this time if they can still transmit COVID-19 despite being vaccinated.

Can Rapid Antigen Tests Detect COVID-19 Variants of Concern?

It is believed that rapid antigen tests are still able to detect COVID-19 caused by a Variant of Concern (e.g. the U.K., South African or Brazilian variants), however, a rapid antigen test cannot tell if a COVID-19 infection has been caused by a Variant of Concern.

If an individual tests positive with a rapid antigen test, they will be required to seek a confirmatory, lab-based PCR test within 24 hours. At present, all positive lab-based PCR samples in Ontario are undergoing screening for any of the known Variants of Concern.

What if I Have A Positive Result?

A positive result on a rapid antigen screening test is considered a preliminary positive and should be followed up with a laboratory PCR test to act as a confirmatory test within 24 hours. Individuals with a preliminary positive result will be required to self-isolate until they receive diagnostic results from the confirmatory test. As with all COVID-19 testing there is the possibility of a false negative, individuals should continue to follow infection and prevention and control measures including wearing all required PPE and maintaining physical distancing.