



September 22, 2021

Provincial Antigen Screening Program, Rapid Antigen Testing, and Take-Home PCR kits

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Provincial Antigen Screening Program?

The [Provincial Antigen Screening Program](#) allows organizations to add an additional safety measure to workplaces, healthcare settings and other organizations, to help reduce the chance of introducing COVID-19 into those settings. This program operates by distributing rapid antigen screening tests to enhance screening measures for asymptomatic individuals (i.e. people who have no symptoms), and people who have been vaccinated, who might otherwise be missed in regular screening protocols. It is important to note that the rapid antigen tests are not the same as lab-based PCR tests.

To see if your organization qualifies to receive a free rapid test kit, please visit covid-19.ontario.ca/get-free-rapid-tests.

What are the program requirements? What is the eligibility criteria to apply? Can Schools apply?

Organizations interested in participating in the [Provincial Antigen Screening Program](#) should visit ontario.ca/testingonsite to determine eligibility.

All organizations that are permitted to open under [Reopening Ontario Act](#) whereby individuals must be physically present on-site, may be eligible to participate in the program, pending available government inventory.

What is a Rapid Antigen Test? How does the test work?

Rapid antigen testing is used to screen for potential COVID-19 infection in asymptomatic individuals (people who have no symptoms). A rapid antigen test can be performed anywhere (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.

Rapid antigen tests use a nasal swab. The antigen test looks for proteins from the COVID-19 virus. Results are available in about 15 to 20 minutes; at the same site the sample is taken. This test may be useful for repeated screening of asymptomatic people in settings where individuals might come into close contact with one another, such as certain workplaces or healthcare settings. Frequent screening with rapid antigen tests (2-3 times per week) is recommended to increase the chance of identification of cases in otherwise asymptomatic individuals. Vaccinated individuals may continue to be

included in rapid antigen testing initiatives, as an added layer of precaution in the prevention of transmission of COVID-19.

It is important to note that Rapid testing does not replace public health measures such as symptom screening, physical distancing, appropriate use of PPE (masking, eye protection) and hand hygiene. Rapid testing can be thought of as an additional screening tool. Any positive results from rapid testing must be confirmed with laboratory-based testing. For more information on Rapid Antigen Testing, please visit our [website](#).

Can Rapid Testing diagnose someone with COVID-19 infection?

A rapid antigen test alone **cannot confirm** you have COVID-19. If your rapid antigen test is positive, you will require a second test, called a polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test, to confirm your positive COVID-19 result. This lab-based PCR test will need to be completed as soon as possible, preferably within 24 hours of your positive rapid antigen test, and will typically need to be done at an [Assessment Centre](#). This is because rapid antigen tests have lower accuracy compared to lab-based PCR tests.

A negative result does not guarantee that you are not infected with COVID-19 or that you will not spread it to others, and cannot be used to stop isolation for someone with symptoms. Continue to follow all public health guidance to help prevent the spread. For more information, please visit OttawaPublicHealth.ca/covid19.

What is the Take-home PCR kits Program?

The take-home PCR kits is a program created by Ottawa Public Health in collaboration with CHEO. The take-home PCR kits contain a PCR COVID-19 test that does not require confirmatory testing, and results will be reported to OPH by the lab as per usual process. The test kits will be offered to staff and students who develop symptoms or are identified as high-risk contacts. OPH hopes that these kits will reduce barriers to testing for those who develop symptoms and/or are identified as high-risk contacts.

For those with symptoms and who are unable to attend a testing centre, completing a take-home test kit may allow the child to return to school sooner if the result is negative. Kits can be completed on-site (e.g., in the parking lot at school), or at home, and can be returned to school or to the Brewer Assessment Centre (151 Brewer Way) during regular hours.

Kits are currently available at 127 schools and will be rolled out to an additional 180 schools in fall 2021. The first round of schools were selected based on anticipated barriers to testing among attendees.

What is the difference between a Rapid Antigen Test, and Take-home PCR testing kit?

The take-home PCR testing kit includes a combined mouth and nose swab that a child and adult can do themselves, or that can be done by a parent, guardian, or caregiver. It

is important to note that student tests cannot be performed or supervised by School Staff.

The take-home PCR tests are less invasive and more comfortable than the usual COVID-19 test, and only takes a few seconds to complete. The take home tests will include detailed instructions on how to do the test, how to fill out the form included in the kit, labelling and storing the test sample, and where to return it. Instructions on how to complete the take-home PCR test can be found on CHEO's [Youtube Video](#). When a Take-home PCR kit is returned, it is sent to the lab, which analyzes it in the same way as a test done at an Assessment Centre, so results are typically available within 24 to 48 hours.

Rapid antigen tests, on the other hand, are not the same as PCR tests. A positive result on a rapid antigen test is considered preliminary, or a presumptive positive, and requires confirmation through a lab-based PCR test. Rapid tests are used to test people who do not have symptoms or recent close contact to someone with COVID-19. For more information on rapid testing, please visit OttawaPublicHealth.ca/covid19.

Why are we not using Rapid Antigen Testing for all school-aged children in the public sector, particularly those that are not yet eligible for vaccination?

Rapid Antigen testing is not as sensitive, and alone, cannot confirm if you have COVID-19. Even with rapid testing, there could still be an introduction of COVID-19 within Schools, because there is a chance of false negative results (i.e., a result that indicates the individual is not infected with COVID-19 when in fact they are). Therefore, it is important to continue other protective measures available to decrease the likelihood of introduction and transmission of COVID-19 within schools – including screening for COVID symptoms, masking, distancing, vaccination, and other Social Wise measures within Schools.

OPH aims to have COVID-19 testing more available in Schools by creating the Take-home PCR-based testing kits program, so that when parent(s), caregiver(s), educator(s) and/or student(s) need a test, it will be more readily available.

Can symptomatic individuals get tested using a Rapid Antigen Test instead of PCR tests?

Rapid antigen tests should **not be used** for individuals:

- with symptoms
- who have had close contact with someone who is positive for COVID-19
- who have previously been infected with and recovered from COVID-19
- to diagnose COVID-19 infection

If you have symptoms or are a close contact of a confirmed case, you should be tested with a lab-based PCR test at an OttawaPublicHealth.ca/COVIDcentre, or, you should request a Take-Home testing kit from your School. You do not need a rapid antigen screening test.

It is important to note that you must self-isolate while awaiting your PCR results. If you are a close contact of a confirmed case and you are not fully vaccinated, you must self-isolate for 10 days from your last exposure to the case, regardless of whether or not you receive a negative PCR result.

For more information on COVID-19 testing, please visit [OttawaPublicHealth.ca/covid19](https://ottawapublichealth.ca/covid19).

Where can I find more information?

For more information regarding about the [Provincial Antigen Screening Program](#), please visit COVID-19.Ontario.ca/get-free-rapid-tests, or, call 613-580-674 to speak to a Public Health Nurse from Monday to Friday, 8:30 am to 4:30 pm.

Thank you,

Ottawa Public Health