Rapid Antigen Screening Program for Schools and Licensed Child Care Centres – FAQs

FAQs About the Program
How do I know if my school or child care centre is eligible for the program?

Ottawa Public Health will offer at-home rapid antigen screening tests as an additional layer of preventative COVID-19 screening to schools and licensed child care centres when an increased risk of transmission is identified.

Once a school or child-care setting is identified for the program, a letter will be sent by the school to parents informing them that the kits are available at their school or child care.

Are all students/children in the eligible school/child care required to participate?

Participation in the school or child care rapid antigen screening program is optional. It is not required to attend school/child care. In order to participate students/children must not be fully vaccinated, must not have any symptoms and must not have had close contact in the past 10 days to someone that tested positive for COVID-19. Note that they may participate once they have completed their 10-day isolation period if they have been a close contact.

The goal of the program is to provide an additional level of screening protection for in-person school/child care attendance, in addition to the daily use of the school/child care screening tool, masking, cohorting, and physical distancing, for settings that have been identified to be at higher risk of transmission.

Targeted asymptomatic screening through the use of rapid antigen screening tests has the potential to detect cases in schools/child care centres earlier and reduce the risks of outbreaks and school/child care closures in areas that have a high rate of active COVID-19 cases, when used frequently.

Please note that rapid antigen screening tests are not recommended for use in someone who has previously received a positive test result for COVID-19 and recovered from COVID-19 in the past 90 days.

Can I choose to participate in the program at any time (once my school/child care is selected)?

Parents and caregivers can decide if they would like their child(ren) to participate at any time while the program is underway at their eligible school or child care centre.
Can I test my whole family using rapid tests?

No. The rapid antigen test kits supplied are only intended to be used to test the participating student/child.

How long does the program last once my school/child care setting is identified as eligible?

The duration of the program will be made clear in the letter from OPH that is provided with the kits. The school or child care setting will be provided with enough screening test kits for the period indicated. Generally a program will run for 2-4 weeks, depending on the risk identified by OPH.

If rapid antigen screening detects additional cases, does this mean that the school/child care should close and/or should not have been reopened if it had recently been closed?

The goal of the program is to identify students/children who may have acquired COVID-19 who would not otherwise have been identified and allow them to self-isolate to prevent introduction of COVID-19 back into the school/child care. This could help decrease the size and/or frequency of COVID-19 outbreaks in the school/child care centres, which could help keep schools/child care centres open and maximize in-person learning and participation for students/children.

OPH closely monitors each school/child care in outbreak and during reopening following a school/child care closure. Rapid antigen screening is an added layer of protection to prevent the re-introduction of COVID-19. Each school/child care outbreak is reviewed on a case-by-case basis with the safety of students, children, service providers and staff being the highest priority for OPH.

FAQs about Rapid Antigen Tests

What is a rapid antigen screening test?

A rapid antigen screening test is used to screen for potential COVID-19 infection in people who have no symptoms (are asymptomatic). The test looks for proteins from the COVID-19 virus, which could indicate the possibility of a COVID-19 infection. It is quick and accessible – results are available on the spot within 15 minutes. Its purpose is to screen for infection, but it does not confirm a COVID-19 diagnosis. A positive rapid antigen screening test requires a COVID-19 PCR test to confirm the result.

It is important to note that rapid antigen screening does not replace public health measures such as daily school/child care screening, masking, physical distancing, and staying home when sick or when asked by OPH to isolate. This is because rapid antigen tests have lower accuracy compared to lab-based PCR tests, so a negative test result on a rapid antigen test does not guarantee that you have not acquired COVID-19 virus or that you will not spread it to others. It can be thought of as an additional
screening tool to provide an added layer of protection in settings where the risk of transmission may be higher.

Rapid antigen screening tests are most effective when they are repeated frequently. This is why participants in our screening program are asked to do the test 3 times per week.

**When should my child use a rapid antigen screening test versus a PCR test?**

**Rapid antigen screening tests** are used to screen for the possibility of COVID-19 and can be used when all the following criteria are met:

- The parent/caregiver has received a letter from the school/child care inviting them to participate in the screening program.
- The student or child does **not** have any symptoms of COVID-19.
- The student or child has **not** been identified as a high-risk contact.
- The student or child is **not** fully vaccinated* against COVID-19.

Please note that rapid antigen screening tests are not recommended for use in someone who has previously received a positive test result and recovered from COVID-19 in the past 90 days.

**PCR tests** (either using a Take-Home PCR test from your school/child care centre or done at an Assessment Centre) are used to diagnose COVID-19 when:

- Your child has symptoms of COVID-19, AND/OR; Your child has been identified as a high-risk contact of someone who is positive for COVID-19, AND/OR;
- Your child has tested positive on the rapid antigen screening test.

It is important to note that you must self-isolate while awaiting your PCR test results. If you are a close contact of someone who has received a positive test result to COVID-19, you must self-isolate for 10 days from your last contact with the individual, regardless of whether or not you receive a negative PCR test.

**Instructions for Participants:**

**How will I get my rapid antigen screening test kits?**

Once notified of eligibility, parents and caregivers will arrange with their school or child care to pick up the rapid antigen screening test kits.

**What will be included in the test kits?**

You will receive enough BNTX rapid antigen screening tests with instructions to last until the end of the program. The rapid antigen screening tests are meant to be used three times per week.

You may have also received a take-home PCR test kit. The PCR test kit is to be used if your child has a positive rapid antigen screening test OR they develop symptoms of COVID-19. If your kit did not include a take-home PCR test kit, you can pick one up at
your school, as needed. Some child care settings also have take-home PCR test kits available.

**When and how often do I use my rapid antigen screening test?**

Participating children/students will be asked to be tested three (3) times per week for the duration of the program. It is recommended that children/students be tested at home, before going to school or child care, on Mondays/Wednesdays/Fridays.

**How do I administer the rapid antigen screening test at home?**

Please refer to [How to test yourself with BTN Rapid Response™ COVID-19 Antigen Rapid Test At Home](#) document for step-by-step instructions. See here for a [video](#) for more information on how to use the rapid antigen test kit.

**Results after rapid antigen screening and what to do**

- You will know the result of the test within 15 minutes.
- If the result is **negative**, your child may attend school/child care as usual.
- If the result is **positive:**
  - Your child must self-isolate immediately.
  - Please have your child seek confirmatory **PCR testing** as soon as possible (within 24 hours of the positive rapid antigen screening test). This can be done by using a take-home “PCR Test kit” from your school or child care. You may also book an appointment for a PCR test at a local [assessment centre](#).
  - Siblings or other people in the home who are not fully vaccinated* must stay home until the student/child who tested positive on a rapid test gets a negative result from a PCR test or is cleared by OPH.
  - Your child must continue to self-isolate until the PCR result is available.
  - If the PCR result is **negative** and your child does not have symptoms, they may stop isolating.
  - If the PCR result is positive:
    - Your child must continue to isolate.
    - Any household contacts who are not fully vaccinated* must also continue to isolate.
    - Ottawa Public Health will follow-up to provide you with further guidance.

**Fully vaccinated** means that it has been at least 14 days since you received:

- The full series of a COVID-19 vaccine authorized by Health Canada (e.g., two doses of Moderna, Pfizer-BioNTech or AstraZeneca/COVIDSHIELD, or one dose of Janssen [Johnson & Johnson]) or any combination of such vaccines, OR
- One or two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine not authorized by Health Canada (e.g., Sinopharm) followed by one dose of a COVID-19 mRNA vaccine authorized by Health Canada (e.g., Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna) OR
- Three doses of a COVID-19 vaccine not authorized by Health Canada (e.g., Abdala).