GUIDANCE FOR RAPID ASYMPTOMATIC COVID-19 SCREENING IN ALBERTA

Overview

Rapid testing in individuals who do not have any symptoms of disease (i.e. they are asymptomatic) is done to screen for potential COVID-19 infection. When a rapid test is used in people without symptoms, it is a screening test, not a diagnostic test. Screening using rapid tests identifies some, but not all, pre-symptomatic and asymptomatic cases leading to earlier isolation. This document outlines the parameters and guidelines for conducting asymptomatic screening using rapid tests in all settings.

COVID-19 Rapid Screening Parameters and Risk Mitigations

Required Parameters	• COVID-19 screening does not remove the obligation of employers to abide by the public orders issued by the Alberta Chief Medical Officer of Health (CMOH), as well as adhere to occupational health and safety requirements. . • Tests must be used in compliance with testing guidelines issued by Health Canada and the CMOH. • All tests must be used in accordance with manufacturer's guidelines including test storage, swab use, and test administration. • Personal and health information must be collected, used, disclosed, and protected by any applicable privacy laws, including the *Personal Information Protection Act* (PIPA), the *Health Information Act* (HIA), and the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (FOIP).
Screening Eligibility	• Individuals with core COVID-19 symptoms and close contacts of a confirmed COVID-19 case should **not** undergo rapid test screening and instead should immediately be directed to diagnostic testing through the public testing system. Appointments can be made by calling 811 or booking online. Eligible symptoms for symptomatic testing are available on the Government of Alberta website. • Rapid screening in the context of a COVID-19 outbreak should only occur under direction of public health authorities. • Individuals who have received a COVID-19 vaccine are still eligible for asymptomatic screening.

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Guidelines for Providing Rapid Screening	- All screening must be performed on Health Canada-approved testing devices and should be used in compliance with testing guidelines issued by the CMOH. - Organizations **should not use** testing devices that have not been approved by Health Canada, as results cannot be meaningfully interpreted. - A screening program does not replace public health measures such as physical distancing, masking, hand hygiene, and isolating when symptomatic or a close contact of a confirmed positive. - Organizations should develop a plan for the following key aspects of a screening program: - A screening process that includes policies and procedures for conducting screening on-site and specifies screening frequency. Screening processes must be in alignment with public health guidance. - Management of a presumptive positive screen from a rapid test. - A systematic procedure in place to provide follow up on test results and communication of screening results back to individuals. - Privacy and security considerations to protect confidentiality of screening results. - An individual who screens positive on the rapid screen is presumed to be positive for COVID-19 until a follow-up test is performed and results are received. They are therefore required to follow mandatory public health measures, including immediately isolating for 10 days or until they receive a negative result on a subsequent PCR test. - A positive result on a rapid screen is not diagnostic for COVID-19. An individual who screens positive requires verification through the public health testing system with a test administered by Alberta Health Services. - COVID-19 antigen tests with a negative result cannot be used to rule out COVID-19 infection. Rapid tests in asymptomatic individuals are not as accurate as PCR tests and a negative result does not guarantee an individual is not infected with COVID-19 and will not spread it to others. - As such, a negative screen result does not permit individuals to stop following Alberta's mandatory public health measures. - Please note that recent infection with COVID-19 may interfere with test effectiveness. Screening these individuals is not recommended until at least six weeks after a COVID-19 diagnosis and subsequent results should be interpreted with caution.

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Organization Responsibilities	• Organizations are responsible for all costs related to screening programs they initiate.
	
	• Organizations that conduct rapid COVID-19 screening assume all medical and legal responsibilities associated with the screening programs.
	
	• Organizations that conduct rapid COVID-19 screening are responsible for ensuring proper protocols are in place for COVID-19 screening, including, but not limited to:
	    o quality control testing,
	    o quality assurance practices,
	    o test result interpretation,
	    o biosafety and personal protective equipment,
	    o result sharing (including privacy requirements),
	    o appropriate follow up on positive test results, and
	    o disposal of biohazardous material.
	
	• As per Health Canada guidance, non-healthcare workers with appropriate training are permitted to collect samples for COVID-19 antigen testing. Organizations may also allow people who are being tested to swab themselves, under the supervision of a trained individual who then performs the test and interprets the results.
	
	• Organizations are responsible for ensuring public health measures continue to be followed on sites, including symptom monitoring, physical distancing, masking, and hand hygiene.
	
	• Organizations are responsible for following public health guidelines for positive case management until the individual receives a confirmatory test.
	
	• Organizations are responsible for ensuring compliance with relevant legislations related to the collection of personal health information.

Reporting Requirements	• Organizations that receive rapid tests from the Government of Alberta must adhere to reporting requirements outlined in the Letter of Agreement.
Resources	• Rapid tests may be purchased privately or requested from the Government of Alberta. To submit a request for rapid tests from the Government of Alberta, please email rapidtesting@gov.ab.ca. • For specific guidance on employer-initiated rapid testing in the workplace, please review the following guidelines. • The FOIP-PIPA Help Desk can answer questions and provide information related to an organization's obligations under PIPA. The FOIP-PIPA Help Desk can be reached toll free in Alberta by dialing 310-0000 followed by 780-427-5848 or SA.AccessAndPrivacy@gov.ab.ca. • For general information about the HIA, the HIA Help Desk can be toll free in Alberta by dialing 310-0000 followed by 780-427- 8089 or by email at HiaHelpDesk@gov.ab.ca.
Attachment	• Quick Reference Card to support understanding of asymptomatic screening results (Appendix A)

This document and the guidance within it is subject to change and will be updated as needed.

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Appendix A – Quick Reference Card

Understanding Rapid Asymptomatic Screening Results

A positive result on a test administered to an asymptomatic individual is not reliable and requires verification through the public health testing system, with a test administered by Alberta Health Services. Rapid/POC tests in this scenario must be approved for COVID-19 screening in asymptomatic individuals.

Rapid/POC screening result	
Positive	**Negative**
Advice	
• A confirmatory test through the public testing system is required. • Based on the screening result, employers should advise the case to isolate until it is verified through the public health testing system, and can advise non-fully vaccinated close workplace contacts to quarantine and monitor for symptoms. A fully vaccinated person is someone who has received two doses of vaccine in a two dose vaccine series or one dose in a one dose vaccine series; and fourteen days have elapsed since the date on which the person received the second dose of the vaccine of a two dose series or one dose of the vaccine in a one dose vaccine series.	• Rapid/POC tests tend to have a lower sensitivity than PCR tests, and therefore a negative rapid test result cannot rule out infection. • Close contacts of known cases or individuals who have been exposed to a known outbreak should get a PCR test performed through the public testing system. • Public PCR testing can be booked online or by dialing 811.
Actions	
• Individual should call 811 to schedule a public system test and inform 811 staff of positive rapid/POC test result. • Individuals with a presumptive positive screen are required to follow public health guidelines and must immediately isolate until public laboratory confirmatory test results are available. • If the public PCR test result is negative, and the individual and close contacts remain asymptomatic, they can return back to work.	• Understand that this is a point-in-time result. It does not guarantee that the individual is not infected with COVID-19 or will not spread it to others. • Symptomatic individuals or individuals who develop symptoms should follow public health recommendations, even if the test result was negative. • Continue to follow public health recommendations including physical distancing, masking, hand hygiene, cleaning & disinfection, and isolating when ill. • A negative result does not change isolation and quarantine requirements for an individual who is a close contact. Individuals should ensure public health orders are followed.
Reporting requirements	
• No reporting necessary. The public testing system will report results as required based on verification with a test administered by Alberta Health Services. • Individuals who test positive on the confirmatory test will be contacted through existing public testing system processes.	• No reporting necessary. • Negative COVID-19 diagnostic test results must be made available at the specific request of the Chief Medical Officer of Health or the Zone Medical Officer of Health.

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