

# GUIDANCE FOR AT HOME COVID-19 RAPID ANTIGEN TESTING

## Overview

Rapid antigen tests are one tool available to Albertans to assess if they have contracted COVID-19. They perform best when used for people who have symptoms, to determine if they have COVID-19. However, they can be used in the home to identify some, but not all, pre-symptomatic and asymptomatic cases, leading to earlier isolation in detected cases and reducing potential spread. This document outlines the recommended swabbing process for a rapid antigen test and what to do depending on the results. This document and the guidance within it is subject to change and will be updated as needed.

Emerging evidence indicates that taking a sample by swabbing an individual's mouth, throat and nose is most effective for detecting COVID-19 when using a rapid antigen test. For more information, please see the instructional video on how to swab an individual's mouth, throat and nose produced by the Ontario COVID-19 Science Advisory Table, available on YouTube at: [youtube.com/watch?v=LJhdIWWdXT4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LJhdIWWdXT4)

Note that if only one site is sampled, it should be the nose, as sampling the mouth or throat alone has not been shown to be as sensitive as the nose alone in Canadian studies.

## How to swab your mouth and nose

1. Don't eat, drink, or take oral medication for 30 minutes prior to collecting the sample.
2. Wash your hands.
3. Remove the swab from wrapper and grasp handle.
4. Insert the swab into your mouth and rub the inside of each cheek, between the cheek and gums, rotating the swab for 5 seconds.
5. Gently rub the back of your throat or tongue in a circular fashion for 5 seconds.
6. With the same swab, insert into the front of one nostril and gently wipe around the inside of your nose 3-5 times.
7. Repeat in the other nostril.
8. Follow the manufacturer's instructions on how to process the sample.

Parents and guardians of children who are under the age of 2 years of age can swab the cheeks, back of the mouth and nostrils of the child as explained above, for the purposes of administering a rapid test at home. The parent or guardian should consult their primary care provider for advice on whether a healthcare provider-administered molecular test should be considered for their child.

## COVID-19 INFORMATION

# GUIDANCE FOR AT HOME COVID-19 RAPID ANTIGEN TESTING

If you are symptomatic (i.e., fever, cough, shortness of breath, runny nose, sore throat or loss of sense of taste or smell), you should isolate until symptoms resolve whether you have a positive or negative test result. The COVID-19 assessment tool can be used to determine what type of care is needed based on your symptoms and how to manage mild symptoms at home: [ahs.ca/covidscreen](https://ahs.ca/covidscreen).

People at greater risk from COVID-19 may be eligible for medical treatments. Since the available treatments should be administered within 3-5 days of when symptoms start, it is very important that you use the assessment tool as soon as you start to experience symptoms.

### Recommended next steps after receiving a rapid antigen test result

People who test positive for COVID-19, or who have COVID-19 symptoms not related to a pre-existing condition, should isolate.

#### Positive rapid test

##### With symptoms

##### You Should Isolate

Notify all close contacts from the previous 48 hours that they should monitor for symptoms and be cautious about going to any high-risk settings.

Isolate for at least 5 days or until your symptoms have improved and you have been free of fever for 24 hours without the use of fever reducing medication, whichever is longer.

- After isolation (5 or more days), wear a mask at all times while in indoor spaces with other people for another 5 days (for a total of 10 days). Note that some symptoms may persist beyond 10 days (e.g. loss of taste or smell).

#### Negative rapid test

##### With symptoms

##### You Should Isolate

Stay home and repeat the COVID-19 test once more, at least 24 hours after the first test. If the two tests are negative, stay home until your symptoms have improved and you have been free of fever for 24 hours without the use of fever reducing medication. Symptoms could be caused by another virus that can be transmitted to others.

If the second rapid test is positive, you are considered positive for COVID-19 and should follow the instructions listed under “Positive rapid test” to the left.

- Note that for individuals at high risk of severe outcomes who have symptoms, it is also possible to access PCR testing without waiting for 24 hours to take a second rapid test. See [Symptoms and Testing](#) for eligibility information.

# GUIDANCE FOR AT HOME COVID-19 RAPID ANTIGEN TESTING

## Positive rapid test

### No symptoms

#### You Should Isolate

If your first test is positive, take a second rapid test 24 hours later:

- If the second test is negative, isolation can end unless you develop symptoms.
- If the second test is positive:
  - Isolate for at least 5 days or until symptoms, if present, have improved and you have been free of fever for 24 hours without the use of fever reducing medication, whichever is longer.
  - Notify all close contacts from the previous 48 hours that they should monitor for symptoms and be cautious about going to any high-risk settings.
  - After isolation (5 or more days), wear a mask at all times while in indoor spaces with other people for another 5 days (for a total of 10 days). Note that some symptoms may persist beyond 10 days (e.g. loss of taste or smell).

## Negative rapid test

### No symptoms

#### Isolation is not required

A negative result does not rule out infection.

Note that [molecular \(PCR\) testing](#) is available for people who are at high-risk for severe outcomes or those who work or live in high-risk settings. Since the available treatments should be administered within 3-5 days of when symptoms start, it is very important that you use the assessment tool at [ahs.ca/covidscreen](https://ahs.ca/covidscreen) as soon as you start to experience symptoms.