

COVID-19 INFORMATION

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 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, but they perform best when used for people who have symptoms. 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 a more 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.

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.

COVID-19 INFORMATION

GUIDANCE FOR AT HOME COVID-19 RAPID ANTIGEN TESTING

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.

Fully vaccinated: isolate for 5 days or until symptoms resolve, whichever is longer.

- After isolation period (5 or more days), wear a mask at all times when around others and outside of the home until 10 days have passed since symptoms first appeared.

Not fully vaccinated: isolate for 10 days or until symptoms resolve, whichever is longer.

Negative rapid test

With symptoms

You Should Isolate

Take second rapid test in 24 hours:

- If the second test is negative, continue isolation until symptoms resolve then cautiously resume normal activities.
- 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.

COVID-19 INFORMATION

GUIDANCE FOR AT HOME COVID-19 RAPID ANTIGEN TESTING

No 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.

If your first test is positive, take 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:
 - **Fully vaccinated:** isolate for 5 days or until symptoms resolve, whichever is longer
 - After isolation for fully vaccinated, wear a mask at all times when around others outside of the home until 10 days have passed since symptoms positive test.
 - **Not fully vaccinated:** isolate for 10 days or until symptoms resolve, whichever is longer.

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 as soon as you start to experience symptoms.