

Rapid Antigen Testing  
Rolling Frequently Asked Questions  
Dated February 5, 2021

Updated highlighted in yellow

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**THIS SECTION APPLIES TO REQUIREMENTS FOR PRE-MANDATED  
TRANSITION TO RAPID ANTIGEN TESTING.**

**Current Testing Requirements under the Minister’s Directive: Long-Term Care Homes Surveillance Testing and Access to Homes (effective January 8, 2021)**

**Who must be tested for COVID-19?**

As per the Minister’s Directive: *COVID-19: Long-Term Care Home Surveillance Testing and Access to Homes* (Minister’s Directive) effective January 8, 2021, all staff, student placements and volunteers working in long-term care homes must be tested regularly in accordance with the Minister’s Directive, unless the exception for individuals who have previously had laboratory confirmed COVID-19 applies.

The testing requirements in the Minister’s Directive include all individuals working in long-term care homes who are:

- Staff as defined in the *Long-Term Care Homes Act, 2007*
- Volunteers as defined in the *Long-Term Care Homes Act, 2007*
- Student placement, meaning any person working in the long-term care home as part of a clinical placement requirement of an educational program of a college or university, and who does not meet the definition of “staff” or “volunteer” under the *Long-Term Care Homes Act, 2007*.

The Minister’s Directive also includes additional testing and documentation requirements for general visitors, caregivers and support workers.

**How often must staff, student placement and volunteers be tested for COVID-19 with the antigen test?**

Long-term care(LTC) home licensees are required to conduct frequent COVID-19 testing of staff, student placements and volunteers in accordance with the protocols and frequency described in the Ministry of Health’s Provincial Testing Guidance, unless the

exception in the Minister's Directive for previous laboratory confirmed COVID-19 applies.

- Specimen collection and screening for asymptomatic individuals in high prevalence areas (Yellow/Orange/Red/Grey) should be performed 2-3 times per week.
- Specimen collection and screening for asymptomatic individuals in low prevalence areas (Green) should be performed 1-2 times per week.
  - The lower end of the frequency range would meet the compliance requirements of the Directive. However, homes are encouraged to test at a higher frequency to help reduce asymptomatic transmission of COVID-19.

Where a staff, student placement or volunteer enters a LTC home less often than the frequency contemplated in the Provincial Testing Guidance, homes must ensure that an antigen test is taken each day that they enter the LTC home in accordance with the protocols contained in the Provincial Testing Guidance.

### **What are the testing requirements for caregivers, support workers and general visitors?**

Licensees are required to ensure that caregivers, support workers and general visitors are tested in accordance with the requirements in the Minister's Directive.

#### **Caregivers and Support Workers**

Subject to exceptions in the Minister's Directive, every licensee shall ensure that all caregivers and support workers demonstrate that they have received a negative COVID-19 test result before granting them entry, whether the visit will take place indoors or outdoors:

- a. Green and Yellow Levels. For LTC homes located in PHU regions in green-prevent or yellow-protect levels, licensees shall ensure that caregivers and support workers demonstrate that they have received **a negative PCR Test result in the past two weeks** and verbally attest to not subsequently having tested positive **OR have a negative Antigen Test result on the day of the visit.**
- b. Orange, Red and Grey Levels. For LTC homes located in PHU regions in orange-restrict, red-control or grey-lockdown levels, licensees shall ensure that caregivers and support workers demonstrate that they have received **a negative PCR Test result in the past week** and verbally attest to not subsequently having tested positive **OR have a negative Antigen Test result on the day of the visit.**

## General Visitors

Subject to exceptions in the Minister's Directive, every licensee shall ensure that for general visitors:

- a. Green and Yellow Levels. For LTC homes located in PHU regions in green-prevent or yellow-protect levels, licensees shall ensure that general visitors demonstrate that they have received **a negative PCR Test result in the past two weeks** and verbally attest to not subsequently having tested positive **OR have a negative antigen test result on the day of the visit.**
- b. Orange, Red and Grey Levels. No general visitors are permitted in LTC homes located in PHU regions in orange-restrict, red-control or grey-Lockdown levels.

## Does the Minister's Directive apply to government inspectors?

The Minister's Directive sets out testing and documentation requirements that every licensee must follow with respect to staff, volunteers, student placements, caregivers, support workers, and general visitors, as those terms are defined in the Minister's Directive, the Long-Term Care Homes Act, 2007, and Ontario Regulation 79/10.

As government inspectors do not fall under any of these categories, they are not subject to the testing requirements in the Minister's Directive. Examples of government inspectors include inspectors under the Long-Term Care Homes Act, 2007, the Health Protection and Promotion Act, and the Occupational Health and Safety Act.

## Are sales representatives or maintenance workers subject to the Minister's Directive?

A sales representative is considered a general visitor under the COVID-19 Visiting Policy and is subject to the same requirements that apply to general visitors under the Minister's Directive.

It is the discretion of the LTC home to determine if the maintenance worker is considered a "staff" member for the purposes of the *Long-Term Care Homes Act, 2007* or if they would be accessing the home as a visitor. If the LTC home determines that the maintenance worker is a visitor, the individual would be considered a support worker and the home must follow the testing related requirements for support workers under the Minister's Directive. Alternatively, if the maintenance worker is a staff member, the LTC must follow the testing related requirements for staff under the Minister's Directive.

**Can homes ask a person visiting a very ill or palliative resident to demonstrate that they have received a negative PCR test result or take an Antigen test?**

The requirements for support workers, caregivers and general visitors do not need to be followed in an emergency or palliative situation.

**What type of test for COVID-19 can be done to meet the surveillance testing requirements?**

Currently, COVID-19 testing can be done using a validated real-time polymerase chain reaction (PCR) assay laboratory test or a point-of-care rapid antigen screening test (antigen test) in accordance with the protocols and frequency contained in the [COVID-19 Guidance: Considerations for Rapid Antigen Screening \(Provincial Testing Guidance\)](#).

## Transition Period to Rapid Antigen Testing

### Will long-term care homes be required to transition to rapid antigen testing?

Yes, through the January 27, 2021 memo, the Ministry of Long-Term Care (the “ministry”) signaled the start dates for mandatory transition to rapid antigen tests. Homes must have fully operational rapid antigen testing programs in place in accordance with the following timelines:

Region	Transition Period	Offering “day of” Antigen Tests for caregivers, support workers and general visitors (once permitted)	Initiating 1 weekly onsite Antigen Test for staff, students and volunteers	Full Implementation of the Rapid Antigen Screening Program
Durham Region Health Department Ottawa Public Health Peel Public Health Simcoe-Muskoka District Health Unit Toronto Public Health Windsor-Essex County Public Health Unit York Region Public Health Services	February 8 to 15, 2021	February 16, 2021	February 28, 2021	March 15, 2021
All other public health units	February 16 to 21, 2021	February 22, 2021		

### What if a home is in outbreak? Does the transition schedule still apply?

Consistent with the current clinical guidance from the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health, LTC homes in outbreak should plan to start transition to Rapid Antigen Testing within two weeks of an outbreak being resolved.

## Upcoming Changes to the Updated Minister's Directive

(effective February 8, 2021)

### What are the changes to the upcoming Minister's Directive (anticipated February 8, 2021)?

The frequency of antigen testing remains unchanged. The Minister's Directive will be updated to reflect:

- Staff, student placements and volunteers entering LTC homes two or more days in a 7-day period undergo Antigen Tests on non-consecutive days up to 3 times in the period as soon as possible after beginning a shift (if attending only two times on consecutive days, apply "day of" testing).
- Staff, student placements and volunteers who enter LTC homes only once in a 7-day period undergo an Antigen Test on the "day of" as soon as possible after beginning a shift.
- Caregivers, support workers and general visitors undergo an Antigen Test on the "day of" regardless of how many times they attend to a home in a 7-day period and before contact with residents.

### Do staff, student placements and volunteers need to be tested prior to entry?

No. Staff, student placements and volunteers must be tested as soon as possible after beginning a shift.

### Do I need to come to my workplace on my day off to get tested?

No. Staff, student placements and volunteers should be tested on non-consecutive work days and as such do not need to be tested every day. Staff, students and volunteers should be tested as soon as possible after beginning their shift and should only be tested on days in which they are scheduled to be working. If an individual is only working two days in a row, the antigen test should be performed on both days.

### Can the facility conduct clinics 3 times a week for rapid antigen testing of staff?

The testing frequency noted above is per individual per week. For example, if the 7-day period is Sunday to Saturday, a person who works Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Saturday would be tested on Monday, Wednesday and Saturday.

**Is there anything preventing a home from implementing “day of” testing for staff, students and volunteers (i.e., the same as for caregivers, support workers and general visitors (where permitted))?**

This would be a choice of the home. The ministry’s requirements would not prevent a home from choosing to increase the frequency of staff, student and volunteer antigen testing.

**What if a caregiver, support worker or general visitor attends the home more than once in a single day? Do they need to be re-tested each time?**

Testing is only required once on the “day of” entry to a long-term care home.

**What and who is eligible for the regional exemption to rapid antigen program?**

LTC homes in rural, remote and northern communities will be able to adopt an alternative model for staff, student placements and volunteers in recognition of the unique or exacerbated challenges facing these communities (e.g., lower than average access to human resources). The alternative model will include:

- 1 PCR (lab-based or Abbott ID NOW™ COVID-19 Test) and 1 Antigen Test (Panbio™ COVID-19 Test) on separate days within a 7-day period no later than Feb. 22 (regardless of PHU region).
- For staff, students and volunteers who only attend the home once in a 7-day period, either of these tests would be acceptable.
- For caregivers, support workers and general visitors, an Antigen test would still be required “day of” regardless of how many times the individual presents at the home in a 7-day period.

As a guideline, LTC home licensees may consider the following characteristics for rural, remote and northern communities: a community with a population of less than 30,000, and a travel time that is greater than 30 minutes from a community with a population of more than 30,000; a community that is without year-round road access, or reliant on a third party (such as train, airplane or ferry) for transportation to a larger centre (source: Rural and Northern Health Care Framework/Plan, Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, 2011). Homes that wish to pursue this exemption should notify the ministry.

## Other Questions

### **Why are long-term care homes being asked to start using antigen tests for surveillance testing?**

The Panbio™ COVID-19 Ag Rapid Test is a screening tool that is used for point-of-care testing to detect COVID-19 in 15 to 20 minutes making it simpler and faster to identify potential COVID-19 positive cases that otherwise may be missed.

### **My long-term care home doesn't have the resources or capacity to establish antigen testing at the home; what additional support can a LTC home rely on?**

Recognizing that the transition to antigen testing will require additional preparation, capacity and support, the ministry and Ontario Health will continue to work with LTC and with members of the health care sector to identify local supports (e.g., from pharmacies, community labs, paramedics) that could help conduct antigen testing at long-term care homes.

LTC homes are encouraged to build on their existing relationships within the health sector to aid the implementation of antigen testing.

The ministry is exploring developing an optional Vendor of Record to connect LTC homes wishing to contract with providers to conduct surveillance screening clinics on their behalf in the LTC home. The ministry would look to developing and providing the necessary templates and service agreements to support licensees in making decisions regarding entering into contracts with providers and the terms and conditions on which services are provided. The Vendor of Record would be optional and would not prevent homes from contracting with a qualified vendor that is not on this roster.

### **Testing staff, student placements and volunteers three times a week and caregivers, support workers and visitors on "day of" will require a lot of resources. Who can perform the test?**

The government has recently made regulatory amendments under the *Laboratory and Specimen Collection Centre Licensing Act* (LSCCLA) allowing for a time-limited exemption from the LSCCLA for persons who perform point-of-care antigen testing and who are participating in the Provincial Antigen Screening Program and are in compliance with its conditions.

This change allows a broader range of health professionals to collect specimens and perform COVID-19 point-of-care antigen testing. In addition to all regulated health



professionals, this may include, for example, (active or retired) Personal Support Workers, Occupational Therapists, Registered Massage Therapists and others. A list of examples is included in Appendix 1 at the end of the Update: Enhancing the Protection for LTC Homes Memo.

### **How many Panbio™ kits should LTC homes order?**

LTC homes will need to acquire the necessary kits for each round of testing from their local/regional distribution source (or from Ontario Health using an online request form, available here). Please note that swabs should be ordered 7-14 days in advance, to ensure timely delivery. Homes are encouraged to pre-order testing kits for multiple rounds of testing (e.g., bulk order).

Ontario Health recommends that LTC homes order approximately one month's supply of testing kits at a time. Where possible, Ontario Health encourages head offices to place and receive orders for multiple homes.

### **Do individuals need to provide consent every time they are tested?**

The health practitioner administering the COVID-19 test must obtain the consent of the individual in accordance with the *Health Care Consent Act, 1996*. An individual must consent to a test for COVID-19 before the test can be administered— this includes staff, student placements, volunteers, caregivers, support workers and general visitors.

### **If an individual has been vaccinated or immunized for COVID-19, do they still need to be tested prior to visiting a long-term care home?**

Yes, the testing requirements of the Minister's Directive continue to apply to individuals who have been vaccinated, in addition to continuing to follow public health measures including masking, physical distancing, hand hygiene, and symptom screening. This includes active screening on entry to the LTC home for symptoms and exposures for COVID-19, including temperature checks, attesting to not be experiencing any of the typical and atypical symptoms of COVID-19 (in accordance with Directive #3 issued by the Chief Medical Officer of Health).

### **What happens if individuals refuse to be tested?**

The health and safety of individuals in long-term care homes is a top concern. Testing results help protect individuals in the home (e.g., staff, student placement, volunteers, residents) from exposure to infectious diseases. As provided in the Minister's Directive, every licensee of a LTC home must ensure that no staff, student placements,

volunteers, caregivers, support workers or general visitors enter the LTC home unless the requirements contained in the Minister's Directive for testing have been met.

### **Do individuals who test positive on the rapid antigen test need to be confirmed with lab-based PCR testing?**

A positive test result on the rapid antigen test should be considered a preliminary positive and requires a confirmatory laboratory-based PCR test. The following actions should be taken:

1. Counsel individual that the result is preliminary positive and PCR confirmation is required.
2. Issue guidance to return home and self-isolate until receipt of confirmatory laboratory PCR test result.
3. Ensure confirmatory laboratory-based PCR testing is performed within 24 hours.
4. Report the preliminary positive result to the local Public Health unit as soon as possible.

### **Does a preliminary positive result on the Panbio™ COVID-19 Ag Rapid Test mean the LTC home is in outbreak?**

No, a preliminary positive result does not mean the LTC home is in outbreak. The individual who tested positive is required to have a confirmatory PCR test. Local Public Health Units will remain the authoritative body on the declaration of a COVID-19 outbreak, which will continue to be based on the presence of a positive result on a confirmatory, lab-based PCR.

### **Does the Panbio™ COVID-19 Ag Rapid Test detect the variants of concern in Ontario?**

Yes, Abbott (the manufacturer of the test) confirmed that the test can detect the new variants. The test detects the nucleocapsid protein rather than the spike protein (where the mutation exists) and therefore is not expected to be affected by a mutation in the spike protein.

### **Who can I contact if I have any issues?**

Please send any issues to [covid19testing@ontariohealth.ca](mailto:covid19testing@ontariohealth.ca) (or your Ontario Health primary contact) with a description of your issue.