

Summary of Changes to Testing Guidance for the Retirement Homes Sector

Effective August 27, [Provincial COVID-19 Testing Guidance](#) and [COVID-19 Guidance: Considerations for Antigen Point-of-Care Testing](#) have been updated to support provincial preparations for the Fall COVID-19 season. The following changes may impact retirement homes:

Who Should be Tested

- Further to RHRA's recommendations on asymptomatic screen testing released July 14, 2021, which recommended that retirement homes limit their asymptomatic screen testing policies to asymptomatic staff that have not been fully immunized, provincial guidance now states that **asymptomatic screen testing and antigen point-of-care testing (POCT) are not recommended for individuals who are fully vaccinated.**
 - An individual is considered fully vaccinated 14 days or more after receiving their second dose of a two-dose COVID-19 vaccine series or their first dose of a one-dose COVID-19 vaccine series.
 - Guidance indicates that the likelihood of COVID-19 is low for this group which reduces the utility of screening and could result in an increase of false positive results.

Test Types

- In order to maintain capacity of the provincial testing system for symptomatic individuals and close contacts of confirmed cases, retirement home workers, visitors and government inspectors of retirement homes are **no longer eligible to receive asymptomatic lab-based PCR testing through the publicly-funded system.**
 - This includes use of designated testing centres for specimen collection as well as use of public labs to process test samples.
- In conducting their asymptomatic screen testing programs, retirement homes can use rapid antigen POCT and continue to be pre-approved to order test kits through the Provincial Antigen Screening Program. For more information on how to onboard and order tests for the first time, please visit www.orcaretirement.com/news/coronavirus-update-resources/pasp/.
- **Confirmatory testing is still required for a positive antigen POCT, and now can be done using a rapid molecular test (e.g., ID NOW) when rapid molecular tests can be reported into the Ontario Laboratories Information System (OLIS) as well as using laboratory-based PCR testing.**
 - A positive result on a rapid molecular test following a preliminary positive on an antigen POCT would be considered a confirmed test result, whereas a negative result on a rapid molecular test following a preliminary

positive on an antigen POCT would require confirmation with a laboratory-based PCR test.

Specimen Collection

- To further expand access to antigen POCT, **self-screening at home has been enabled** through two changes to guidance:
 - Voluntary, unsupervised self-swabbing has been enabled. Note that organizations may still elect to have a health professional or trained individual perform the test, and/or permit supervised self-swabbing.
 - Waste generated from at-home rapid antigen screening is exempt from guidance for disposal of test kits for organizations performing on-site workplace antigen screening programs, and instead, persons undertaking at-home rapid antigen tests should consult their local municipality's by-laws on the proper disposal of this waste to ensure it can be disposed of with the household trash.
- As a reminder, any individual supervising self-swabbing or doing self-swabbing must consult the [self-swabbing training resource](#) developed by Ontario Health in collaboration with Public Health Ontario and ensure they have appropriate knowledge, skills and judgement to perform the test.
- Please note, self-testing should not be performed to test for COVID-19 infection in symptomatic individuals, individuals with known contact with a COVID-19 case or in outbreaks.

Test Frequency

- As an update to the POCT frequency recommended by RHRA on July 14, 2021, provincial guidance has been updated to recommend that **antigen POCT be performed at least one time per week, and up to 2-3 times per week for individuals who are not fully vaccinated.**
 - While indicating that there is inadequate evidence around the optimal frequency, the guidance also notes the most appropriate use case for antigen POCT is for frequent, repeated screening of asymptomatic individuals.

Retirement homes may have a number of questions regarding these changes. The following contact points may be of assistance:

- For questions regarding access to the Provincial Antigen Screening Program, retirement homes can continue to contact the Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility at RHInquiries@ontario.ca
- For questions regarding individuals who require asymptomatic screen testing as well as the frequency, test modality and approved specimen collection methods for asymptomatic screen testing, retirement homes can continue to contact the Retirement Homes Regulatory Authority at info@rhra.ca.

- For other questions about information contained in updated provincial guidance, retirement homes can contact the Ministry of Health, Emergency Operations Centre EOCOperations.MOH@ontario.ca.