
SUBJECT: COVID-19 Rapid Antigen Testing Changes
Date: October 4, 2024
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To: Primary Care Physicians, Emergency Departments, Walk-in Clinics
From: Dr. Nicola Mercer, Medical Officer of Health & CEO

- **COVID-19 rapid antigen test kits (RATs) are publicly funded for eligible symptomatic patients and those living in high-risk settings.**
- **Primary Care and Pharmacies can access RATs via the provincial PPE supply portal to provide the test in the office or pharmacy for eligible symptomatic patients.**
- **There is no limit to how many RATs you can order through the portal.**
- **Order as many RATs as you anticipate needing 1 to 2 weeks in advance (allowing for a turnaround time of 6-8 business days).**

The Provincial Government has changed to a ‘Test-to-Treat’ approach for all COVID-19 testing including PCR and rapid antigen tests (RATs). As a result, publicly funded RATs are only available to:

1. Populations eligible for COVID-19 antiviral treatment (Paxlovid or remdesivir, see Box 1);
2. Populations in high-risk settings including Long-term care (LTC), Retirement Homes (RH) and congregate settings.

Patients who are eligible for antiviral treatment but do not live in a LTC or RH can access RATs through primary care and pharmacies. The provincial supply is limited so RATs will no longer be provided through public health units or other community organizations.

To order publicly funded RATs, primary care and pharmacies need to use the [provincial PPE supply portal](#). Please consider ordering a supply of RATs to test your eligible patients.

Since provincial supply of RATs is limited, they are intended for **symptomatic eligible** patients only and should not be broadly distributed. However, it may make sense to provide some eligible patients with a kit to perform at home using a [recommended self-testing method](#). Alternatively, you may choose to perform the RAT in your office/clinic/pharmacy.

Most patients do not qualify for free RATs through the Province. However, testing is the key mechanism for determining COVID-19 positivity. Where patients are able to access tests through other means, they should be encouraged to do so. In situations where tests are not available, patients should follow public health guidance on masking, isolation and care of symptoms.

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RATs are available free of charge to eligible patients. Additionally, Paxlovid is fully covered under the Ontario Drug Benefit (including OHIP+ and Trillium Drug Benefit) through [LU codes 673, 674, and 675](#).

Box 1

Individuals are eligible for COVID-19 antiviral treatment if they have COVID-19 symptoms and are at increased risk of severe COVID-19 outcomes because they are either:

- 65 years of age or older
- Immunocompromised (e.g. bone marrow or solid organ transplant, active hematological malignancy, CAR-T cell therapy)
- At increased risk due to other conditions (e.g. chronic lung, liver, or kidney disease)

Paxlovid (nirmatrelvir/ritonavir) should be started within 5 days of symptom onset, or Remdesivir should be started within 7 days of symptom onset.

For additional details, refer to [Ontario Health's Recommendations for Antiviral Therapy for Adults with Mild to Moderate COVID-19 \(April 2, 2024\)](#).

For more information, please contact:

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