

Considerations for Rapid Asymptomatic COVID-19 Screening

Benefits and Limitations of Screening Using Antigen-based Tests

What Screening Can Do

- Rapid COVID-19 tests are used to screen for potential COVID-19 infection in individuals who are asymptomatic (i.e., they do not have any symptoms of infection) or pre-symptomatic (i.e., the period before symptoms start).
- Screening using rapid tests identifies **some, but not all**, asymptomatic and pre-symptomatic cases and can limit viral transmission by isolating infected people earlier.

What Screening Cannot Do

- Screening cannot diagnose COVID-19. A confirmatory lab-based PCR test is required for diagnosis.
- Screening cannot rule out COVID-19 infection. In individuals with no symptoms, false negatives are common.
- A screening program does not replace public health measures such as physical distancing, masking, hand hygiene, staying home and accessing testing when sick, and the mandatory isolation of COVID-19 cases and quarantine of their close contacts.

Why Implement a Screening Program?

- A COVID-19 rapid screening program provides another layer of protection to assist in keeping work places safe. It is not a replacement for current recommended control measures such as masking, physical distancing, hand hygiene, etc., but rather is another layer of protection.

Screening Program Requirements

- **Screening programs operated by employers must follow:**
 - [Guidance for Employer-initiated Testing](#)
 - [Guidance for Rapid Asymptomatic COVID-19 Screening in Alberta](#)
- Screening programs are only for people without symptoms and with no known exposure to COVID-19 (not a close contact). People with symptoms or people who are known contacts should receive a diagnostic COVID-19 test through Alberta Health Services.
- All screening must be performed on [Health Canada-approved testing devices](#) and must be used in compliance with testing guidelines issued by Alberta's Chief Medical Officer of Health (CMOH) and in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions.
- Anyone who screens positive is required to isolate for 10 days as per Chief Medical Officer of Health Order 06-2021 unless they receive a negative result on a

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confirmatory lab-based PCR test.

- Anyone who screens negative is required to continue to observe all public health rules and guidelines.
- Screening programs are valuable when screening is performed at frequent regular intervals. It is recommended that screening be done once or twice per week.
- Organizations that receive rapid tests from the Government of Alberta must provide reporting as outlined in the Letter of Agreement.

Screening Plan

- Organizations wishing to implement a Rapid Screening Program will need to develop a plan for the program.

Components of the Screening Plan

Managing Personal Information

- Registration and consent procedures
- Data management – results recording and reporting
- Privacy and protection of personal information

Program Oversight and Process

- Detailed overview of the screening process including:
 - [Health check](#) to ensure symptomatic individuals are not screened
 - Cleaning and disinfection procedures for the testing site
 - Hand hygiene and personal protective equipment (PPE) protocols for personnel
 - Sample collection procedure
 - Testing procedure
 - Results notification
- Oversight of the screening program
- Training plan for sample collection and test procedures
 - Samples are to be collected and tests processed by someone who has completed the required training. Organizations may allow people who are being tested to swab themselves, under the supervision of a trained individual who then performs the test and interprets the results.

Communication

- Plan for managing presumptive positives, which could include:
 - How the person will be removed from the site and supported to go to an appropriate place to isolate (usually at home) and instructed to arrange confirmatory testing through an AHS assessment center.
 - Procedure for identifying and managing on-site contacts (optional).

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- Follow-up protocol.
- Appropriate and consistent messaging for delivering results:
 - Negative results – need to clearly state that the rapid screen does not rule out COVID-19 infection and that all public health guidelines must be followed.
 - Positive results – need to clearly state that the individual is required to immediately isolate and should seek a confirmatory test through AHS.

Logistical Considerations

- Identify someone who will oversee and administer the program (such as an employee, volunteer, contractor, etc.) The responsible individual must ensure that:
 - All aspects of the rapid screening program align with relevant public health guidelines.
 - The individuals doing sample collection or performing the tests are adequately trained and monitored.
 - Records are kept and provided to public health officials if required.
 - Weekly reporting is provided to Alberta Health or the lead organization (Chamber of Commerce, pharmacy, etc.) who is responsible for reporting to Alberta Health.
 - Any issues or questions that arise during the screening program are addressed.
- Physical set up
 - Where the screening will happen
 - How the space will be set up
 - Storage of tests, personal protective equipment, documentation of results, quality control, disposal of biohazardous waste, etc.
- Frequency and timing of screening
 - Recommendation is once or twice per week. Less often has limited value.
 - Screening can happen before entering a facility, at the start of a shift, at any time during a shift, or during set ‘screening clinics’ arranged at certain days/times. Each option has its own logistical considerations. An organization has to identify which approach works best for them.
- Workflow