

TO: Child Care Licensees

FROM: Phil Graham
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Early Years and Child Care Division

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SUBJECT: **COVID-19 Screening for Licensed Child Care – Accessing Rapid Antigen Point-Of-Care Tests through the Ontario Together website**

The government values the important role that all child care workers continue to play in keeping children and families safe during the COVID-19 pandemic and the Ministry of Education is committed to keeping you updated on important health and safety information that will help you operate your programs. The purpose of this memo is to provide you with information on accessing rapid antigen point-of-care tests to support voluntary COVID-19 screening for child care staff/providers.

Provincial Antigen Screening Program

Licensed child care operators (both child care centres and home child care agencies) are eligible to access free rapid antigen point-of-care tests by participating in the voluntary [Provincial Antigen Screening Program](#). The government will provide participating organizations with free rapid antigen point-of-care tests, pending available inventory.

With results available in about 15 minutes, rapid antigen screening allows licensees to quickly identify potential COVID-19 cases among child care staff/providers who have passed the initial standard screening and are not showing symptoms (i.e., are asymptomatic).

These tests add an additional complementary safety measure to mitigate risk and help reduce the spread of COVID-19. However, the tests do not replace the existing screening protocols that are currently required.

Participation in the program is voluntary and there are training, biohazard waste, and reporting requirements for participants. Interested licensed child care operators should review program requirements for the [Provincial Antigen Screening Program](#) as well as the information available on the [COVID-19 Testing for Organizations](#) page and the [Safe handling and management of rapid antigen COVID-19 testing waste](#) page. This will help you determine whether this program is a good fit for your organization.

Accessing Rapid Antigen Point-of-Care Tests

If your organization has decided to participate in the Provincial Antigen Screening Program, the [Ontario Together](#) website provides a 'one-stop shop' to digitally manage intake, onboarding, and ordering requirements and access related training resources and materials.

How to access tests:

1. Visit the [Ontario Together website](#) and click "Check your Eligibility and Apply."
 - As part of onboarding, you will be required to complete an attestation to confirm you will use the rapid antigen point-of-care tests in accordance with the program guidelines.
 - If you operate multiple child care centres, you will need to apply for each individual site, using individual licence number(s). You will be able to enter delivery address(es) where you wish to receive your rapid antigen point-of-care tests. These addresses do NOT have to be the child care premises. **It is important that someone is available to receive your shipment, so please take that into consideration when choosing a location (e.g., head office)**
2. Once onboarded, eligible sites will receive an initial shipment of rapid antigen point-of-care tests, after which licensees can order on an as needed basis.
 - Rapid testing kits are temperature sensitive and cannot be left on a doorstep. Once they are received, they must be stored appropriately.
 - If there are specific delivery instructions (e.g., staff only onsite in the morning) please ensure you include this information during the application process.
3. Report basic testing data to the Ministry of Health
 - All program participants are required to submit weekly program data through a reporting portal (e.g., number of rapid antigen point-of care tests used, number of individuals who tested positive).

There are a variety of resources available to support you in setting up a COVID-19 antigen screening program. The attached tip sheet provides a quick reference to get started, but you are also required to review all of the relevant resources available on the following websites:

- [Provincial Antigen Screening Program](#)
- [COVID-19 Testing for Organizations](#)

Using Rapid Antigen Point-of-Care Tests in Child Care Settings

All sites implementing rapid antigen screening in Ontario must ensure the tests are used in accordance with the [COVID-19 Guidance: Considerations for Antigen Point-of-Care](#)

Testing.

Given rapid antigen screening is voluntary, it is only intended to complement, not replace, existing screening and health and safety protocols already in place. Licensed child care programs must continue to follow all requirements under the *Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014*, as well as the direction outlined in the [Ministry of Education's Operational Guidance for Child Care](#), and any direction provided by their local Public Health Unit.

The Provincial Antigen Screening Program provides rapid antigen point-of-care tests to employers for use with their employees or other identified groups. The following individuals are eligible to use the tests in licensed child care settings:

- staff and providers
- students on placement
- adults who reside, or are regularly, at a home child care premises

At this time, free rapid antigen point-of-care tests provided to licensed child care programs are not intended to be used to screen children. Licensees are expected to maintain their current screening protocols for children and are encouraged to use the provincial [COVID-19 school and child care screening tool](#).

Where possible, testing of staff/providers should happen 2-3 times weekly during the first 2 steps of Ontario's [reopening plan](#) and 1-2 times per week during step 3 of the reopening plan. Only asymptomatic individuals should be tested using rapid antigen point-of-care tests. Individuals who have received a COVID-19 vaccine, regardless of whether they have received one or two doses, should be encouraged to participate.

Per the [COVID-19 Provincial Testing Guidance](#), rapid antigen tests should not be used if your workplace is currently experiencing a confirmed or suspected outbreak.

Rapid antigen point-of-care tests are considered a screening tool not a diagnostic tool and a positive result on a rapid antigen test is considered a **preliminary positive**. Any individual receiving a preliminary positive must self-isolate and receive a follow-up, confirmatory lab-based PCR test at a [COVID-19 Assessment Centre](#) within 48 hours to verify their results.

If you are informed that a confirmatory lab-based PCR test is also positive, please follow regular steps for reporting a confirmed case of COVID-19 through the Serious Occurrence process outlined in the [Ministry of Education's Operational Guidance for Child Care](#). As always, you must also follow direction of the local Public Health Unit.

Disposing of Rapid Antigen Point-of-Care Tests

Waste generated from rapid antigen point-of-care tests is considered hazardous under the [Environmental Protection Act](#). All sites implementing rapid antigen screening in Ontario must ensure that rapid antigen point-of-care tests are disposed of in accordance with the requirements set out on the [Safe handling and management of rapid antigen COVID-19 testing waste website](#).

Pharmacy COVID-19 Testing

If your organization decides that you do not wish to participate in the Provincial Antigen Screening Program, there are other locations where both staff/providers and children can access rapid antigen screening or PCR testing for asymptomatic individuals.

Select pharmacies are offering either rapid antigen screening or PCR testing to asymptomatic children attending child care and asymptomatic child care staff/providers.

Licensees may wish to encourage their staff/providers, as well as parents and guardians, to take advantage of this testing to support the continued safe operation of child care. To book an appointment, individuals should contact the store directly.

- 1) Select Shoppers Drug Mart locations and select Loblaws pharmacies are offering in-pharmacy COVID-19 **rapid antigen screening until the end of June 2021**. Participating pharmacies can be found online at: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/covid-19-tests-students-school-staff-without-symptoms>
- 2) Pharmacies that currently offer **COVID-19 PCR testing** across the province will continue to accept appointments on an ongoing basis. Details on pharmacies participating in PCR testing can be found at: [COVID-19 testing locations](#).

It continues to be important to reinforce strong health and safety practices in all child care settings even with added layers of prevention through rapid antigen screening and increasing numbers of child care staff/providers who have received their first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine. You may access a copy of the latest health and safety guidance available on the ministry [website](#).

The COVID-19 pandemic has introduced several challenges. We thank you for your efforts and contributions in supporting Ontario's children and families during this time.

Sincerely,

Phil Graham

c. Consolidated Municipal Service Managers and District Social Services Administration Boards