

Rapid Asymptomatic COVID-19 Screening: Program Overview

What is a Screening Test?

When a rapid COVID-19 test is used in people without symptoms, it is a screening test, not a diagnostic test. Screening individuals with rapid tests can identify some, but not all, asymptomatic and pre-symptomatic cases and can limit viral transmission by isolating infected people earlier.

Rapid screening 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. Those who have a negative result on a rapid test may still be infected with COVID-19 and be able to spread it to others.

Rapid Asymptomatic COVID-19 Screening in Alberta

Alberta Health has a supply of rapid COVID-19 test kits that are available, at no charge, to public, private, and not-for-profit employers and service providers across all sectors to support COVID-19 screening programs in their facilities. The goal of supporting these programs is to prevent and reduce the spread of COVID-19 in the community and protect those most at risk of unavoidable COVID-19 exposure or severe outcomes, including those who provide essential and front-line services and those who work in outbreak-prone environments.

Uses for Rapid Asymptomatic COVID-19 Screening

Rapid COVID-19 tests used to screen people without COVID-19 symptoms should be viewed as red-light/yellow-light tests, where a positive result stops a person from entering a site, while a negative result allows entry but requires the person to continue to be cautious and to follow all public health guidelines. It cannot be viewed as a green-light test where a negative result allows a person to disregard public health rules like wearing a mask or socially distancing. This is because these tests, while useful as a screening tool, are not as accurate as a lab-based PCR test, and in the case of negative results, can be wrong as often as 1 in 5 times.

Rapid COVID-19 screening is most effective when used to screen the same individuals on a regular basis (once or twice a week). The table below outlines the most effective uses, which Alberta Health will support, less effective uses, which Alberta Health will consider on a case-by-case basis, and unacceptable uses.

Most Effective Uses	Less Effective Uses	Unacceptable Uses
Regular testing of employees in a workplace with significant interaction with the public	Pre-event testing	Testing of people with symptoms or with known exposure

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Regular testing of employees in a workplace where public health guidelines can't be followed or where they are insufficient to prevent transmission	Testing of non-employees when they enter the site	Testing of people for the purposes of removing masks or avoiding other public health guidelines
Regular testing of employees in large workplaces or in workplaces with a lot of face-to-face interaction among workers	Testing of employees who are primarily virtual but enter the workplace sometimes	Testing of people without a process to remove them from site if they test positive
Regular testing of non-employees who enter a site multiple days a week		Testing people to create a "bubble" that is considered safe

Establishing Your Rapid Asymptomatic COVID-19 Screening Program

To establish a screening program, an organization will require a health care provider to oversee the screening program. Oversight includes assuming responsibility for ensuring protocols and public health rules are being followed, training non-health care providers to administer and process the tests and communicate results, providing support to the program as required, and reporting on use of the tests.

Acceptable health care providers include Combined Lab and X-ray Technician; Dentist; Licensed Practical Nurse; Medical Laboratory Technologist; Nurse Practitioner; Paramedic; Pharmacist; Physician; Psychiatric Nurse; Respiratory Therapist; or Registered Nurse.

Because the tests are administered with nasal swabs, they may be performed by a non-health care provider who has received the training required to collect the samples, process and analyze them, and communicate the results.

Organizations may also allow people who are being tested to swab themselves, under conditions outlined in the organization's testing protocol and agreed to by Alberta Health.

Organizations must also have processes in place for using personal protective equipment (PPE), recording and reporting screening results, biohazardous waste disposal, and managing individuals who screen as positive, etc.

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The following rapid tests are currently available from Alberta Health: Abbott Panbio, BD Veritor, and Quidel Sofia. Alberta Health will determine which test an organization receives based on site consideration, screening program details, and available inventory.

Organizations are responsible for all costs related to screening programs they initiate. Alberta Health will only provide the rapid tests free of charge.

Requesting Rapid Tests

More information is available online after March 24, 2021, or by emailing rapidtesting@gov.ab.ca.