

**DATE:** May 14, 2021

**TO:** Assistant Deputy Ministers of all Provincial Antigen Screening Program Participants, and related stakeholders involved in the deployment of free COVID-19 antigen point-of-care test kits in Ontario.

**FROM:** Melissa Thomson  
Assistant Deputy Minister, Testing Planning and Implementation  
Pandemic Recovery and Response Division, Ministry of Health

**SUBJECT:** Expanding Uptake of Antigen Screening

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This memo serves to inform you of changes to the COVID-19 antigen point-of-care testing landscape in Ontario, which are intended to further reduce implementation barriers and enable widespread uptake across the province.

**I. The Ontario Together website for accessing antigen point-of-care test kits is now live.**

Organizations looking to implement COVID-19 antigen screening at their site can now see if they are eligible to receive free antigen point-of-care test kits through the Ontario Together website.

The [COVID-19 Testing for Organizations](#) page provides a 'one-stop shop' for organizations to apply for antigen point-of-care test kits through the Provincial Antigen Screening Program, based on the expanded eligibility criteria outlined below. The website streamlines intake and provides all the necessary guidance and information about how to order tests and set up a testing program.

More information can be found at [ontario.ca/testingonsite](http://ontario.ca/testingonsite).

**II. Expansion of eligibility to receive free COVID-19 antigen test kits.**

Further building on the success of the antigen point-of-care testing under the Provincial Antigen Screening Program, any organization that is permitted to open, and that requires employees to be physically present, will now be eligible to receive free antigen point-of-care test kits for asymptomatic screening purposes. This expansion is being pursued to ensure public health and safety among sites that are currently open, and in anticipation of future reopening as the pandemic evolves.

The Ministry of Health continues to work with the Federal Government to maintain an appropriate supply of tests to meet provincial demand and expanded eligibility.

### **III. Removal of requirement to report preliminary positive results on antigen point-of-care tests to Public Health Units.**

Effective May 12<sup>th</sup>, 2021 an amendment to Regulation 569 under the Health Protection and Promotion Act (HPPA) has been put in place such that sites implementing antigen point-of-care screening in Ontario are no longer required to report preliminary positive results to Public Health Units. This applies to sites implementing antigen screening using point-of-care tests provided free of charge by the government, as well as sites implementing private testing.

This change was pursued in response to concerns that the reporting of preliminary positive results was challenging for sites to manage, as well as concerns raised by Public Health Units who have limited capacity to act on preliminary positive results in a timely way, particularly in the context of the third wave of the pandemic.

There is no change to the requirement that positive results from lab-based PCR tests be reported to Public Health Units.

### **IV. Streamlining programmatic reporting requirements for sites receiving free antigen point-of-care test kits from the government.**

To further simplify and streamline weekly programmatic data reporting requirements, the Ministry of Health has removed the requirement for organizations implementing antigen point-of-care screening to report confirmatory lab-based PCR results. Sites are now only required to report the following aggregate level data to the province on a weekly basis:

- Number of antigen point-of-care test kits used.
- Number of invalid antigen point-of-care test results.
- Number of individuals who tested positive with an antigen point-of-care test.
- Number of individuals who tested negative with an antigen point-of-care test.

This change is expected to facilitate increased uptake among organizations by easing reporting requirements, while maintaining strong oversight of antigen screening distribution and use across the province through the tracking of above metrics.

### **V. Removal of registration and manifesting requirements for sites using antigen point-of-care tests.**

In consultation with the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks, has removed the registration and manifesting requirements for organizations using antigen point-of-care tests under the Environmental Protection Act (EPA). This change will remove barriers to sites that may not be aware of their requirements under the EPA and will support sites to focus on building safe management and disposal infrastructure.

The following regulatory obligations imposed on site generators are removed:

- **Registration:** submitting an initial Generator Registration Report to the Director (under the EPA) before transferring waste from the site.
- **Manifesting:** completing a manifest in respect of the waste that is leaving the site.

The following regulation obligations are still in place:

- **Storage and handling:** The operator and owner of the site must store, handle and maintain the waste so as to prevent leaks or spills, and not store the waste for a period exceeding 24 months.
- **Hiring an approved waste transportation system:** The generator must only transfer waste offsite using a registered waste transportation hauler. These haulers would complete additional paperwork to explain the origin of the waste as required for transferring purposes.

Facility operators are encouraged to follow the manufacturer instructions for safe use of COVID-19 antigen point-of-care kits and associated wastes. The following is general guidance for the proper storage and handling of this waste:

- The waste must be stored in containers to prevent leaks or spills and maintained in a way that prevents damage or deterioration of the container.
- The waste should be segregated from all other wastes by depositing it into an appropriate container with the appropriate yellow universal biohazard label.
- The waste should be stored in a secure area, not accessible to the general public, and not adjacent to supply storage areas or areas used for food preparation or consumption.

Facility operators must only transfer waste offsite using a registered waste transportation hauler. Waste management carriers may be able to assist with guidance on proper disposal options.

This amendment became effective May 12<sup>th</sup>, 2021.

### **Communications and Outreach**

The Ministry of Health is pleased to share these changes with you, our key partners in COVID-19 antigen point-of-care testing implementation.

To ensure this information is communicated broadly to sectors and sites across the province, we would also encourage you to pursue additional outreach to your stakeholders directly to inform them of these changes.

### **Additional Resources**

Provincial Antigen Screening Program documentation will be updated to reflect this change. The Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health will also be releasing updated provincial guidance related to testing to reflect the legislative and operational changes noted above the week of May 17<sup>th</sup>, 2021. This will include updates to the following key documents.

- [COVID-19 Provincial Testing Guidance](#)
- [COVID-19 Antigen Screening Guidance](#)
- [COVID-19 Point-of-Care Test Results](#)

## Key Contact Information

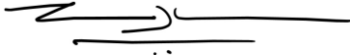
For questions about COVID-19 point-of-care testing and reporting under the HPPA, please contact the Ministry of Health by way of email to: [EOCOperations.moh@ontario.ca](mailto:EOCOperations.moh@ontario.ca).

For questions about antigen point-of-care testing and/or the Provincial Antigen Screening Program, please contact the Ministry of Health by way of email to: [Blair.Audet@ontario.ca](mailto:Blair.Audet@ontario.ca).

For questions about hazardous waste and/or waste disposal of antigen tests, please contact: [John.Armiento@ontario.ca](mailto:John.Armiento@ontario.ca).

For questions about the Ontario Together website, please contact: [Cassandra.McCroy@ontario.ca](mailto:Cassandra.McCroy@ontario.ca).

Sincerely,



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Melissa Thomson  
Interim Assistant Deputy Minister

- c: Karen Moore, Assistant Deputy Minister, Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks
- Fredrika Scarth, Director, Testing Strategy Coordination Branch, Pandemic Recovery and Response Division, Ministry of Health
- Dr. David Williams, Chief Medical Officer of Health
- Elizabeth Walker, Director, Accountability and Liaison Branch, Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health, Ministry of Health