

# Nova Scotia Workplace Screening Program Frequently Asked Questions for Employers

## **What is the Nova Scotia Workplace Screening Program?**

The Nova Scotia Workplace Screening Program supports employers across the province that are interested in implementing regular COVID-19 screening using rapid antigen tests for their employees.

## **Why is screening for COVID-19 in workplaces important?**

As we move through our reopening plan, providing access to testing onsite in workplaces will help keep workplaces safe, more quickly identify cases and outbreaks and lead to faster economic recovery.

## **What is a rapid antigen test?**

A rapid antigen test is a point-of-care test (POCT) that can be performed anywhere by a trained individual and provides results within 15 minutes. It is administered using a nasal swab. In Nova Scotia rapid antigen tests are only used for asymptomatic testing. Individuals with symptoms test through a primary assessment centre, either by booking [online](#) or calling 811.

## **What is the difference between a rapid antigen test and a polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test?**

A rapid antigen test can be performed anywhere by a trained individual and provides a result within 15 minutes. A polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test is performed at a primary assessment centre and sent to a lab to be analyzed.

## **Are rapid antigen tests accurate?**

Rapid antigen tests are less sensitive than lab-based polymerase chain reaction (PCR) tests.

Rapid antigen tests may produce some false negative test results (i.e. a result that indicates the individual is not infected with COVID-19 when in fact they are), and some false positive test results (i.e. a result that indicates the individual is infected with COVID-19 in fact they are not).

For this reason, rapid antigen tests should only be used as a screening tool, and as an added layer of safety for workplaces. Results should be interpreted with caution, and employees should continue to adhere to fundamental public health measures, such as symptom screening, physical distancing, masking, frequent hand washing, and use of PPE where appropriate.

A positive result on a rapid antigen test is considered a presumptive positive and must be followed up with a laboratory-based PCR test to act as a confirmatory test within 24 hours. The individual who received a positive result on the rapid antigen screening test should isolate until the result of the lab-based PCR test is known.

Detailed instructions on what to do in the event of a positive result on a rapid antigen test are provided to all employers who participate in the program.

### **How frequently should employees perform a rapid antigen test?**

Frequent screening (up to 2 times/week) with rapid antigen tests increases the chances of early detection of cases in otherwise asymptomatic individuals. Testing repeatedly and frequently also mitigates the lower sensitivity of a single antigen test.

### **How have rapid antigen tests been used in workplaces in Nova Scotia to date?**

Nova Scotia began piloting the use of rapid antigen tests in workplaces in March 2021 to assess the interest and experiences of employers in using rapid antigen tests as a screening tool to support employee safety and business continuity in a variety of workplaces. Results from this pilot support the value of rapid antigen testing in workplaces for interested employers.

### **Who is eligible to participate in this program?**

Any workplace that is permitted to be open to the public or workplaces where employees must be physically present on site are eligible to apply to participate in this program. Workplaces where individuals must be physically present on site and who meet other risk factors identified by Public Health may be prioritized for earlier implementation if application volumes are high.

Small and medium sized organizations (50 employees or less) will be supported in establishing a screening program through a partnership of Creative Destruction Lab and local Regional Enterprise Networks and Chambers of Commerce. Large organizations (more than 50 employees) will be supported directly by the Department of Health and Wellness.

All organizations wishing to undertake a rapid testing program in Nova Scotia require approval from the Chief Medical Officer of Health. Application details for all organizations can be found at [novascotia.ca/coronavirus/workplace-testing](https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus/workplace-testing).

### **What Does Participation in the Program Mean for my Workplace?**

If accepted to participate in this program, the government will provide employers with free rapid antigen test kits if needed, pending available inventory. In most instances, this will be up to 2 tests, per employee, per week. Other supports such as guidance in developing a testing protocol, training and PPE (if appropriate) are also available for free.

Participating workplaces must adhere to the parameters outlined in the terms and conditions of their approval letter in order to continue receiving a supply of rapid antigen tests and to avoid having their participation in the program terminated by the province.

The free test kits distributed through this program are to be used only for Nova Scotia-based employers and must be used within the duration of the program (i.e., tests cannot be saved for future use). Tests must be used on an employer's own employees or other identified groups; an employer cannot distribute or sell tests to any third party (e.g., a client company) or charge for the administration of a test. This does not preclude employers from using a contracted agency to administer the tests to their employees.

### **Do employers with their own supply of test kits need to apply to participate?**

Yes. Under the Chief Medical Officer of Health Order under the Health Protection Act all organizations wishing to undertake a rapid resting program must first have approval from the Chief Medical Officer of Health. Details on the application process are available at [novascotia.ca/coronavirus/workplace-testing](https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus/workplace-testing).

### **What are the financial considerations for my workplace?**

The provincial government provides participating sites with the appropriate number of rapid antigen test kits to meet sector-specific testing guidelines, for free, depending on available inventory. Other supports such as guidance in developing a testing protocol, training and PPE (if appropriate) are also available for free.

Participating employers will assume all additional program implementation costs (e.g., human resource expenses and the implementation of physical safety measures). Participating sites may choose to contract a private service delivery partner to administer the tests.

### **What type of antigen tests will my workplace receive?**

Currently, provincially supported rapid antigen screening is being conducted using the Abbott PanBio test with a shallow nasal swab. As more rapid antigen technologies become Health Canada approved and available for use in the province, additional devices may be deployed as part of the program

### **How does my workplace receive tests once accepted into the Program?**

Approved workplaces will be provided with information on how to order test kits (if needed) once they have completed their intake process through [novascotia.ca/coronavirus/workplace-testing](https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus/workplace-testing).

Participating employers will need to be able to store any rapid antigen tests received.

### **Will my workplace receive training?**

Training materials and resources will be provided.

### **How should an antigen test be used in this Program?**

Antigen testing is a screening tool and does not diagnose COVID-19. Participating employers must adhere to the following parameters of use throughout the program:

1. Antigen tests must be used in accordance with the terms and conditions outlined in an organization's approval letter. This may include weekly reporting of data for provincially provided tests.
2. Antigen screening tests **do not replace important public health measures such as** symptom screening, appropriate distancing, use of PPE, and frequent hand washing.
3. Antigen screening tests **should only be used on asymptomatic individuals** who have passed the initial standard screening conducted within the workplace. They should not be used for symptomatic individuals, or individuals who have had close contact with known positive cases. Symptomatic individuals, or individuals who have had close contact with known positive cases must book a PCR test at a primary assessment centre by completing the [online assessment](#) or calling 811.

4. Antigen screening tests should not be used in either a confirmed or suspected outbreak in a workplace setting. In these situations, Public Health will provide specific guidance on testing.
5. Antigen screening tests do not allow a workplace to open that should otherwise be closed based on current public health guidance.
6. Individuals who have been infected with and recovered from COVID-19 in the last 90 days should not participate in rapid antigen screening.
7. A positive result on a rapid antigen test is considered a presumptive positive and should be followed up with a laboratory-based PCR test to act as a confirmatory test within 24 hours. Participation in the program may provide participants with priority access to confirmatory lab-based PCR test results, depending on lab capacity.
8. An individual who receives a positive antigen test result must self-isolate, until the result of the confirmatory, lab-based PCR test is known.
9. A workplace can set up their on-site testing clinic following any workflow/process that is operationally feasible and follows appropriate health and safety protocols.

### **What are the key considerations for interpreting test results?**

Rapid antigen tests are less sensitive and specific than lab-based PCR tests, so results are not as accurate. Rapid antigen tests may yield some false negative test results (i.e., a result that indicates the individual is not infected with COVID-19 when in fact they are), and to a lesser extent, some false positive test results (i.e., a result that indicates the individual is infected with COVID-19 when in fact they are not). Results should therefore be interpreted with caution and employees should be reminded of the possibility that the test result may be inaccurate. Participating employers should reinforce the importance of continuing to adhere to the necessary public health measures, such as physical distancing, masking, and frequent hand washing, to reduce the risk of infection.

### **What happens if an employee tests positive?**

If an employee tested with a rapid antigen test receives a positive result, they should be reminded that the test result should be interpreted as a presumptive positive. That employee must seek a lab-based PCR test within 24 hours to act as a confirmatory test and must self-isolate until a confirmatory test result is received.

## **What are the general reporting requirements for organizations receiving rapid antigen tests from the government?**

All organizations receiving antigen screening tests from the Nova Scotia government are required to report weekly on use and results. All data is reported and stored at the aggregate level; no patient identifiable data is collected.

The method for reporting data may vary depending on the size of the organization. Details will be provided to each organization as part of the application process.

The province may, at its discretion, terminate an employer's participation in the program and stop supplying test kits for failing to comply with reporting or other program requirements.

The government may request additional information throughout the course of the program as it evolves in order to inform future use cases for rapid antigen tests, and the impact of antigen screening in a range of workplace settings.

## **What are the reporting requirements in the case of a positive antigen test result?**

A positive result on a rapid antigen test is considered a preliminary (presumptive) positive. Any individual that receives a preliminary positive is required to receive a follow-up, confirmatory lab-based PCR test at a Primary Assessment Centre within 24 hours. This individual must also self-isolate immediately, until the result of the confirmatory lab-based PCR test is known.

The employer is required to report a rapid antigen test positive result to Public Health. Details of this reporting process are provided to employers during the application process.