

Nova Scotia COVID-19 Workplace Screening Program

Guidelines for Approved Organizations

September 2, 2021

This document is intended for individuals or organizations approved for COVID-19 Workplace Screening by the Nova Scotia Chief Medical Officer of Health (CMOH) or a designate of the CMOH. The guidelines in this document provide basic information only and do not replace medical or legal advice.

Rapid point-of-care tests (POCTs) used by organizations in workplaces do not replace important public health measures such as vaccination, symptom screening, appropriate distancing, masking and use of PPE, and frequent hand washing. These Workplace Screening Program Guidelines do not replace employers' requirements to protect the health and safety of workers.

POCTs should only be used on asymptomatic individuals who have passed initial standard screening conducted within the workplace. POCTs should not be used for symptomatic individuals, or individuals who have had close contact with known positive cases.

Any positive results from a POCT must be confirmed with laboratory-based polymerase chain reaction (PCR) testing. Appointments for PCR tests can be booked at a primary assessment centre (PAC) by completing the [online assessment](#) or calling 811.

Organizations such as licensed long-term-care facilities that have pre-existing testing programs in place through an arrangement with Public Health or the Department of Health and Wellness should continue to administer those programs unless given different direction or guidance from Public Health or the Department of Health and Wellness.

In the event of a conflict between these Workplace Screening Program Guidelines with any applicable legislation, orders, or directives issued by the Minister of Health and Wellness or the CMOH, the legislation, order, or directive prevails.

Please see Nova Scotia's COVID-19 [website](#) for more general information as well as for updates to this document.

1. Eligibility

- Access to and use of POCTs in Nova Scotia must be approved by the CMOH or their delegate. Organizations may seek approval using the online forms found [here](#).
- Subject to the specimen collection described below, POCTs may only be performed using a COVID-19 medical device that has been authorized by the Minister of Health (Canada) for point-of-care use and is available in Nova Scotia.
- POCTs are only to be used to screen employees, sub-contractors and/or volunteers. These POCTs are not to be used to screen other members of the public, customers, or clients.
- POCTs can be used in the workplace and at the home of employees. If an employer chooses to distribute take home tests, the following expectations apply:
 - take home test kits must be developed by trained individuals, following instructions developed by the Nova Scotia Health Authority (NSHA)
 - employers can only provide an employee 2 tests per week (e.g., boxes of tests cannot be distributed)
 - tests must be used by within a week of receiving them
- POCTs are appropriate for use in asymptomatic individuals only. Although some POCT devices have been approved by Health Canada for diagnostic testing of symptomatic individuals, the province of Nova Scotia (the Province) is currently only recommending its use for screening of asymptomatic individuals.
- Any individual who is currently symptomatic should book a PCR test at a primary assessment centre by completing the [online assessment](#) or calling 811.

- Individuals who have previously been diagnosed with and cleared of COVID-19 infection may resume asymptomatic screening testing after 90 days from their COVID-19 infection (based on the date of their positive result).
- In general, antigen POCT should not be conducted in an outbreak setting, unless it is being conducted under the guidance and direction of Public Health.

2. Specimen Collection

- Specimen collection must be conducted in accordance with the type of swab included in the test kit and the kit instructions for use.
- Specimen collection for POCTs may be done by health professionals, or other trained individuals.
- Specimen collection for POCTs may also be done by the person being tested ('self-swabbing') either after participating in appropriate training or being overseen by a trained individual.

3. Testing Frequency

- POCT should be performed between 1-3 times per week.

4. Conducting the Test

- A positive result on an antigen POCT is not a diagnostic result and individuals who have tested positive must seek laboratory-based polymerase chain reaction (PCR) testing. Appointments for PCR tests can be booked at a primary assessment centre by completing the online assessment or calling 811.
- Appropriate biosafety precautions, in accordance with the manufacturer's label, must be taken for all antigen POCT to ensure the safety of the individual being tested as well as the individual conducting or supervising the specimen collection and performing the test. PPE is available for free from the Province for participating organizations.

5. Approval Conditions for Organizations Receiving Tests from the Nova Scotia Government

- Access to and use of POCTs in Nova Scotia must be approved by the CMOH or their delegate. Organizations may seek approval using the online forms found [here](#).
- Approval to use POCTs is subject to the conditions that the participating employer will:
 - ensure that the POCTs are used only for employees, sub-contractors and/or volunteers in the workplace, unless otherwise approved by CMOH
 - comply with the reporting process for POCT positive results, which is provided to employers as part of the approval process
 - submit screening data in the form and manner requested by the Department of Health and Wellness or its agents
 - comply with any quality assurance requirements
 - ensure that there is no fee charged to persons being screened with test kits provided by the Province or an agent of the Province

6. Approval Conditions for Organizations with POCTs Supplied by Third Parties and the Federal Government

- In addition to POCTs being provided free of charge by the Province, organizations may have tests supplied by the federal government or through direct purchase from a third party such as the manufacturer.
- Use of POCTs in Nova Scotia must be approved by the CMOH or delegate of the CMOH, no matter the source. Organizations may seek approval using the online forms found [here](#).
- Approval to use POCTs is subject to the conditions that the participating employer will comply with the reporting process for POCT positive results, which is provided to employers as part of the approval process.

7. Organizational Responsibilities

- Organizations providing antigen POCT screening are responsible for:
 - Retaining existing public health measures such as symptom screening, appropriate distancing, using personal protective equipment, and hand-hygiene activities. POCTs are not a replacement for any of these measures.
 - Cooperating with Public Health in the event of a potential workplace exposure of COVID-19 or an outbreak investigation.
 - Having a systematic procedure in place to inform each tested individual of the result of their antigen POCT, a process in place for steps to take when there is a positive antigen POCT result, recommendation for and information about accessing confirmatory PCR testing, and return to work requirements.

8. Employers: What to do if an employee has a positive COVID-19 POCT result

- A positive POCT result means that the individual may be infected with COVID-19. However, POCTs may occasionally produce false positive results, and the individual will need a regular laboratory PCR test to confirm their result.
- Here are key steps to follow if an employee tests positive at the employer-led testing site:
 1. Inform the individual of their result and outline their responsibility to go home and self-isolate immediately. They must isolate until they receive a negative PCR result or receive further direction from Public Health in the case of a positive PCR result.
 2. Inform the individual that they should go to the [online screening tool](#) to book a PCR test at a PAC.
 3. Provide the individual with a lab requisition for a priority PCR test at a PAC to confirm the result. The individual must take the requisition to their PAC appointment. Note the lab requisition is a secure document. It will be provided in PDF format and should not be distributed any further than the original recipient.

4. Report all positive results to NSH Public Health via email (email address will be provided once organization approved) with the individual's name, date of birth, health card number, contact information, an indication that the test was positive as well as the date and location of the test (organization name and address).

9. Employees: What to do if you have a positive COVID-19 POCT result

- A positive POCT result means that you may be infected with COVID-19. However, POCTs may occasionally produce false positive results, and you will need a regular laboratory PCR test to confirm your result.
- Here are key steps to follow if you get a positive rapid antigen result:
 1. Confirm the result
 - Get a PCR test as soon as possible (ideally within 24 hours) at a primary assessment centre. Appointments for PCR tests at a primary assessment centre can be made by completing the [online assessment](#) or calling 811.
 2. Self-isolate
 - Go home immediately and self-isolate at home until you receive your confirmatory test result.
 - This means that you should only leave your home for critical reasons (like a medical emergency) and avoid contact with other people (including your household members). Other members of your household do not need to isolate while you are waiting for your confirmatory result.
 - If your confirmatory test is positive, you will need to continue self-isolating, and Public Health will be in contact with you.
 - You may be eligible for paid sick time while you wait for your confirmatory test result and isolation time if you are confirmed to have COVID-19. Additional information on the Nova Scotia Paid Sick Leave Program can be found [here](#).
 3. Safely return to work
 - You need to receive a negative result from a confirmatory test at a primary assessment centre before returning to work.