

Ministry of Long-Term Care

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January 8, 2021

MEMORANDUM TO: Long-Term Care Home Licensees

FROM: Richard Steele
Deputy Minister
Ministry of Long-Term Care

SUBJECT: **Update to the Minister's Directive: COVID-19: Long-Term Care Home Surveillance Testing and Access to Homes regarding the implementation of Rapid Antigen Testing**

The Minister of Long-Term Care (ministry) has issued an update to the Minister's Directive: COVID-19: Long-Term Care Home Surveillance Testing and Access to Homes (Minister's Directive) effective January 8, 2021.

As you know, the Minister's Directive requires long-term care home licensees to conduct frequent COVID-19 testing of staff, student placements and volunteers in accordance with the requirements set out in the Minister's Directive as well as the protocols and frequency described in the Ministry of Health's [COVID-19 Provincial Testing Guidance](#). Pursuant to O Reg 363/20: STAGES OF REOPENING under the *Reopening Ontario (A Flexible Response to COVID-19) Act, 2020* all public health units are currently in the grey zone. For the duration of the Provincewide Shutdown, long-term care home licensees are required to conduct testing at the grey zone frequency as set out in the Minister's Directive.

Previously, the Minister's Directive restricted COVID-19 testing to validated real-time polymerase chain reaction (PCR) assay laboratory tests. Effective January 8, 2021, the Minister's Directive provides that every licensee of a long-term care home shall ensure that staff, student placements and volunteers working in the home regularly take antigen tests or PCR tests at the frequency prescribed in the Minister's Directive. Long-term care home licensees must ensure that where a staff, student placement or volunteer takes an antigen test, that the test is taken in accordance with protocols and

frequencies contained in the [COVID-19 Guidance: Considerations for Rapid Antigen Screening](#), issued by the Ministry of Health

To enable timely test results in this priority setting, effective immediately, homes may conduct surveillance testing utilizing the Panbio™ COVID-19 rapid antigen test, in accordance with the attached Minister's Directive. The ministry anticipates that all long-term care home licensees will transition to testing using the Panbio™ COVID-19 rapid antigen test. The ministry will communicate further information concerning this timing of this transition in the coming weeks. The timeframe for transitioning to exclusive antigen testing will take into consideration the important work underway to rapidly implement immunization clinics in homes.

Homes are strongly encouraged to transition to using the Panbio™ COVID-19 rapid antigen test as soon as possible. Recognizing that this may require additional preparation, capacity and support, the ministry and Ontario Health are committed to supporting effective and timely implementation. Ontario Health will be offering a training webinar on using the Panbio™ COVID-19 rapid antigen test on Tuesday, January 12th at 1pm. ([Register here](#)). The webinar will be recorded and future sessions will be offered to review the content or ask any questions.

COVID-19 Panbio™ antigen testing kits can be ordered directly from Ontario Health using the [online request form](#). Please note that testing kits should be ordered 72 hours in advance, to ensure timely delivery. The testing kit will be provided at no cost to homes. All costs related to testing, for both PCR and rapid antigen tests, are eligible expenses under ministry funding provided for Prevention and Containment.

While regular testing is an important measure for reducing the risk of COVID-19, long-term care homes must also continue to follow their protocols for infection prevention and control, physical distancing, personal protective equipment and hand hygiene. Furthermore, long-term care homes must continue active COVID-19 screening of all staff, visitors and others entering the home (with the exception of first responders) as per Directive #3, issued by the Chief Medical Officer of Health.

These measures are vital for protecting the health, safety and well-being of residents and staff in long-term care homes and are intended to support effective and timely prevention and management of outbreaks.

Thank you for your collaboration and continued support during this ongoing pandemic.

Sincerely,

(original signed by)

Richard Steele
Deputy Minister

cc:

Matthew Anderson, CEO, Ontario Health
Donna Duncan, CEO, Ontario Long-Term Care Home Association
Brent Gingerich, Chair, Board of Directors, Ontario Long-Term Care Home Association
Lisa Levin, CEO, AdvantAge Ontario
Jane Sinclair, Chair, Board of Directors, AdvantAge Ontario
Brian Pollard, Assistant Deputy Minister, Long-Term Care Capital Development Division
Sheila Bristo, Assistant Deputy Minister, Long-Term Care Operations Division
Janet Hope, Assistant Deputy Minister, Long-Term Care Policy Division
Janice Crawford, Director, Legal Services Branch

Attachments:

1. Minister's Directive
2. Antigen Screening Guidance
3. Long-Term Care Home Surveillance Testing FAQs
4. Instructions to order PanBio Antigen Testing Kits
5. Webinar – Rapid Testing in Congregate Settings