

**Ministry of Long-Term Care**

Office of the Associate Deputy  
Minister of Long-Term Care  
Pandemic Response

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January 27, 2021

**MEMORANDUM TO:** Long-Term Care Home Licensees

**FROM:** Erin Hannah  
Associate Deputy Minister  
Ministry of Long-Term Care

**SUBJECT:** **Enhancing the Protection for LTC Homes Through Rapid Antigen Testing and 3<sup>rd</sup> Party Oversight**

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Protecting vulnerable residents of long-term care (LTC) homes is the ministry's highest priority, and we know this priority is shared by home licensees and all LTC partners.

While we continue to roll out the vaccination program, we must also be vigilant on all other fronts to protect homes. That is why we are taking a next step to build on the testing and screening programs in LTC homes.

In the Deputy Minister's memo dated January 8, 2021, we shared that the *Minister's Directive, COVID-19: Long-Term Care Home Surveillance Testing and Access* (Minister's Directive) had been updated to include rapid Antigen Tests as an acceptable test for staff, student placements and volunteers. At that time, homes were strongly encouraged to start using Antigen Tests to help prevent the virus from entering LTC homes.

**New mandated requirements for Rapid Antigen Testing:**

We are now mandating that all LTC homes transition to point-of-care rapid antigen tests for staff, student placements and volunteers, as well as caregivers, support workers, and general visitors (where permitted entry). The timeline for adopting the new requirements are as follows:

- **For LTC Homes in:** Toronto Public Health, York Region Public Health Services, Peel Public Health, Windsor-Essex County Public Health Unit, Ottawa Public Health, Durham Region Health Department and Simcoe-Muskoka District Health Unit.
  - **Start transition by February 8, 2021, and**
  - **Ensure fully operational by February 16, 2021.**
- **For LTC Homes in:** All other Public Health Units
  - **Start transition by February 16, 2021, and**
  - **Ensure fully operational by February 22, 2021.**

Consistent with the current clinical guidance from the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health, LTC homes in outbreak should plan to implement the program within two weeks of an outbreak being resolved.

During the transition to full operations, PCR testing frequency as outlined in the Minister's Directive dated January 8, 2021 will remain unchanged. Once Rapid Antigen Testing programs are fully operational in LTC homes, PCR testing will continue to be used only in instances where individuals are symptomatic or have a positive antigen test result, individuals have been in contact of a confirmed COVID-19 case, a home is in outbreak, or as otherwise directive by local public health.

### **Frequency of Rapid Antigen Testing:**

The Minister's Directive will be updated no later than February 8, 2021 to require all LTC home licensees to ensure:

- Staff, student placements and volunteers who enter LTC homes two or more days in a 7-day period undergo Antigen Tests on non-consecutive days up to 3 times in the period prior to entry into the LTC home.
- Staff, student placements and volunteers who enter LTC homes only once in a 7-day period undergo an Antigen Test on the "day of" prior to entry into the LTC home.
- Caregivers, support workers and general visitors undergo an Antigen Test on the "day of" regardless of how many times they attend to a home in a 7-day period.

A negative Antigen Test result is required according to the above frequencies before individuals are permitted to enter the home and have contact with a resident or another "cleared" person. Individuals awaiting their Antigen Test result may be permitted to wait in a separate and secure area where physical distancing is possible or in another area (e.g., personal vehicle).

### **Implementation Supports:**

The Panbio™ antigen screening test can be administered using three different modes of specimen collection using the swab included in the test kit. This means rapid antigen testing can be performed using a combined swab of throat and both nares or a deep nasal swab, both of which are authorized by Health Canada (i.e., does not need to be a nasopharyngeal swab). Details on the sensitive nature of different modes can be found on the Public Health Ontario website by clicking [here](#).

Changes have been made to regulations under the *Laboratory and Specimen Collection Centre Licensing Act* (LSCCLA) to create a time-limited exemption that allows more health professionals to perform the Antigen Test, from swabbing through to processing and communicating the screening result. This may include, for example, Personal Support Workers, Occupational Therapists, Registered Massage Therapists and others (see FAQs for more examples).

Recognizing that LTC home licensees are best placed to know what delivery approach is going to work in their home(s), and recognizing the flexibility provided through the allowable specimen collection modes and expanded number of persons who can perform the Antigen Test, the decision about whether to operate the program directly with your own new or existing staff or contract with a willing local partner (e.g., a local pharmacy) is up to each of you. The ministry is developing a template service agreement that we will make available to LTC home licensees by request.

As an extra support, the ministry is also exploring the development of a Vendor of Record (VoR) that LTC homes could use to connect to a willing service provider. This may provide another option for homes however we do urge you not to wait for this potential tool to begin your planning and implementation.

As a reminder, costs associated with the Rapid Antigen Test program are eligible expenses under the Preventing and Containment funding.

Lastly, Ontario Health has been providing training webinars on using the Panbio™ COVID-19 Test. The first webinar was held on January 12, 2021 and a [recording of the webinar](#) is available for viewing. Additional training webinars will be available (and recorded) on the below dates:

- Monday, February 1, 2021, 1 pm – **Overview of Antigen Test in long-term care**, that will summarize the Antigen Test, updates to the Minister's Directive, how and when to use the Test, getting started and how to order test kits. [Register here](#).
- Thursday, February 4, 2021, 1pm – **Training on how to run a Antigen Test screening clinic**, that will cover staff, materials and space required, how to collect and test samples, and how to interpret and document results. [Register here](#).

#### **Data collection:**

The ministry's Health Data Collection Service (HDCCS) website will be updated to include Rapid Antigen Test reporting. The enhanced data collection will be launched by February 8, 2021 and training materials and sessions will be available to LTC homes. If you have any questions on the enhanced data collection or require access to the HDCCS website, please contact [AskHealthData@ontario.ca](mailto:AskHealthData@ontario.ca) with the subject line of "COVID-19 LTCH testing data collection". In the interim, we must stress the importance of all homes entering weekly reports as this information is being shared with decision-makers on a regular basis to help determine how well measures are working in protecting homes.

#### **Ordering Antigen Test Kits:**

As previously communicated, Antigen Test kits can be ordered directly from Ontario Health using the [online request form](#). Please note that requests for swab kits should be submitted between Monday and Wednesday and at least 7 business days in advance, if possible, to ensure timely delivery. There will be no cost to homes for Antigen Test kits and we recommend that a four-week supply is ordered at one time. All costs related to testing, for both PCR and Antigen Tests, are eligible expenses under ministry funding provided for Prevention and Containment.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact [covid19testing@ontariohealth.ca](mailto:covid19testing@ontariohealth.ca).

#### **Testing Adherence Program:**

As communicated on January 19, 2021, home licensees are also required to put third party oversight in place to ensure that people entering LTC homes adhere to applicable screening and testing requirements, including those in the CMOH Directive #3, the Minister's Directive and any additional applicable public health screening requirements imposed by local public health. As a reminder, dedicated funding is being provided to support this program and changes to the Minister's Directive to reflect this requirement.

Please note that third party services already retained by licensees do not need to be replaced. Licensees may also use their own existing vendor arrangements with third party providers (including those who are not on the provincial Vendor of Record that has been made available to licensees). Staff who have been hired and/or trained to conduct active screening may continue in this role under the oversight of a third party or may be redeployed to other areas of work (data recording and reporting for example).

I hope this information has been clear and helpful to you as you continue your important work to provide a safe home to so many people across the province. Should you have any questions (or wish to request a template service agreement for the Rapid Antigen Test program) please contact Renee Mahalanobis, Director, Long-Term Care Projects and Stabilization in my office at [renee.mahalanobis@ontario.ca](mailto:renee.mahalanobis@ontario.ca).

In closing, I want to thank you again for your continued commitment in keeping our most vulnerable Ontarians safe during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sincerely,

*Original signed by*

Erin Hannah  
Associate Deputy Minister

c: Richard Steele, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Long-Term Care (MLTC)  
Sheila Bristo, Assistant Deputy Minister, Long-Term Care Operations Division, MLTC  
Dr. David Williams, Chief Medical Officer of Health  
Dr. Barbara Yaffe, Associate Chief Medical Officer of Health  
Alison Blair, Associate Deputy Minister, Pandemic Response and Recovery Division, Ministry of Health (MOH)  
Michael Hillmer, Assistant Deputy Minister, Capacity Planning and Analytics Division, MOH/MLTC  
Lisa Levin, Chief Executive Officer, AdvantAge Ontario  
Donna Duncan, Chief Executive Officer, Ontario Long Term Care Association  
Monika Turner, Association of Municipalities of Ontario  
Michael Jacek, Association of Municipalities of Ontario  
Colleen Geiger, President and CEO (Acting), Public Health Ontario  
Renee Mahalanobis, Director, Long-Term Care Projects and Stabilization, MLTC

Attachment 1 – Rapid Antigen Screening: Questions and Answers