Interim infection prevention and control guidance for the supervision of rapid antigen screening test for COVID-19 in pharmacies

10 December 2021

This document provides guidance for infection prevention and control (IPC) for the supervision of rapid antigen COVID-19 screening tests in the pharmacy setting, New Zealand.

These interim guidelines recognise that individual pharmacies will need to tailor their response to local patterns of disease and available resources. For those industries and other non-health care settings this document provides high level guidance.

The IPC guidelines on page 3 and 4 should be read in conjunction with the following guidance/information:

- Rapid antigen testing – Ministry of Health
- COVID-19: Infection prevention and control recommendations for health and disability care workers – Ministry of Health

Interim Guidance for the Provision of Rapid Antigen Screening at Pharmacy

Purpose

This document has been developed to provide guidance to suitably trained pharmacy staff who will be supervising individuals who need to undertake a rapid antigen test for COVID-19 in the pharmacy setting in order to:

- Support unvaccinated people to travel safely within New Zealand
- Reduce the number of people with undiagnosed COVID-19 infection travelling to high risk areas.
Background

New Zealand has implemented a range of diagnostic testing measures to promptly identify cases of COVID-19 infection and prevent transmission of COVID-19 in New Zealand, including rapid antigen detection and conventional laboratory molecular (PCR) testing.

Should a person in New Zealand be confirmed to have COVID-19 infection, the Ministry of Health and regional Public Health Units have procedures in place to identify people they have been in close contact with. Those people are provided with advice about self-isolation to minimise spread of infection.

The best way to avoid getting infected with COVID-19 is to get vaccinated and to adhere to infection prevention advice such as wearing a mask or face covering, maintaining a physical distance of at least 1m and performing hand hygiene. The use of rapid antigen testing in community settings is another tool to support diagnosis of COVID-19 infection and reduce the risk of exposure to others.

Other health measures include; not going to work or school if unwell and having a Covid-19 test, isolating if instructed to by the local medical officer of health and, where necessary, verbal screening of people to ensure they have not attended a venue of concern.

When rapid antigen testing is not appropriate

If a person has flu-like symptoms or symptoms associated with COVID-19, or is a close or casual contact for COVID-19, rapid antigen screening should not be used, and the person should be directed immediately for a laboratory-based PCR test for COVID-19.

The location of PCR testing sites across New Zealand can be found:

**Where to get tested – Unite Against COVID-19**
**COVID-19 Testing – Healthpoint**

Appropriate signage regarding COVID-19 symptoms to the entrance of pharmacy to be displayed to advise people not to enter if they have symptoms of COVID-19

Service model

Only rapid antigen test devices approved by the Ministry of Health can be used for COVID-19 testing in New Zealand.

Please note that in line with current directives, self-testing at home currently remains prohibited. Rapid antigen testing must be performed in conjunction with a suitably trained pharmacy staff member who can oversee the performance of the testing.

Use of rapid antigen tests

Rapid antigen testing for COVID-19 is not suitable for use in symptomatic people or in other settings where COVID-19 infection is suspected.

All pharmacy staff members supervising people must be trained in the correct use of the device and the interpretation of the test results.

Results

Staff are to follow national advice on communicating results to person.
Infection prevention and control measures

Environmental considerations for the provision of safe rapid antigen screening

Provision of safe rapid antigen screening recommends that:

- the testing environment is fit for purpose.
- the size of room and ventilation is adequate (e.g. opening window or mechanical ventilation).

Rooms used should comfortably fit two people and should be of a size that you can maintain 1 metre physical distance at all time whilst you supervise person self-testing.

Room should be clutter free of other items

Have either a dedicated table or bench space for placing equipment needed for person to perform the test and all items ready for use.

Refer to: COVID-19: Ventilation – Ministry of Health

Personal protective equipment

Items of personal protective equipment (PPE) should be put on before entering dedicated RAT’s area where person will be performing RATs.

- Medical mask
- Single use gloves

Hand hygiene must be done before donning PPE.

Gloves are single use and should be discarded after use – wash/sanitise hands after removing.

**Note:** Medical masks can be worn sessionally up to four hours. If mask becomes damp or soiled, medical mask must be changed more frequently.

Used items should be removed and appropriately discarded in separate area away from person/general public.

Order for putting on (donning) and removing (doffing) PPE:

**Donning**
- Perform hand hygiene
- Medical mask – ensure good fit to face
- Gloves

**Doffing**
- Place items in bin after removal
- Remove gloves
- Perform hand hygiene
- Remove medical mask (if not wearing sessionally)

**During supervision of test**
- Maintain 1 metre physical distancing from person during test.
- Advise person to pull down their mask to just under their nose just before performing nares swab.
- Ask person to pull mask up over nose once they have swabbed nares.
- Person to proceed as per instructions for test.
**Waste management**

- Used rapid antigen test kits can be disposed of safely with general rubbish. This is because any potential covid-19 virus is inactivated by the solution used, and the cartridge is contained.

- Used PPE is considered general waste (materials are not recyclable) and do not require special disposal arrangements, however, it is recommended that waste be disposed of safely and in sealed rubbish containers. Regular emptying of rubbish containers should be undertaken to avoid overflow or the need to touch used materials again, once disposed of.

**Cleaning**

Ensure cleaning of all surfaces touched/used by person undertaking the test is done after person has left premises and before the room is used.

Refer to: [COVID-19: General cleaning and disinfection advice](#)

**Training materials and links**

A range of training materials have been developed by the Ministry of Health to support rapid antigen testing in clinical and non-clinical settings:

- [Handwashing and drying poster – Health Quality and Safety Commission New Zealand](#)
- [Hand rub (sanitiser) guideline poster – Health Quality and Safety Commission New Zealand](#)
- [COVID-19 Rapid antigen testing guides for business – Ministry of Health](#)
- [COVID-19 Antigen RDT - instructional video - CareStart™](#)
- [Test yourself for COVID-19 with rapid antigen test - instructional video - Roche](#)
- [COVID-19 Ag Rapid Test Device nasal swab procedure – instructional video- Abbott Panbio™](#)