

Rapid Antigen Tests – Frequently Asked Questions

Rapid Antigen Tests (RAT) are provided by Yukon Government for symptomatic persons of all ages for self-testing if they are not getting assessed by a healthcare provider.

Why are these tests being used in Yukon?

Yukon government as well as other local agencies provide access to free home based rapid antigen tests or RAT to support other options for persons to access testing that is a low-barrier option for Yukoners. This testing approach provides more individual autonomy in the management of COVID-19 as we transition to a more endemic phase in a highly immunized population where there is less severity of illness.

Can I trust a RAT result?

It is important to note that the sensitivity and specificity of these tests differ from that of lab-based molecular tests and can vary widely from product to product. This is also true in the detection of variants of concern like Omicron. Within the context of widespread community transmission of COVID-19, the likelihood of a positive RAT reflecting true infection is high. However, the utility of a negative result, specifically in the presence of symptoms or lack of repeat testing, is suboptimal and should be interpreted with caution. A negative RAT should never be used to change a recommended isolation time nor be used to support symptomatic persons continued presence within a workplace. This especially true for symptomatic health care workers or persons who access higher risk settings.

Who should not be getting a RAT?

Anyone who is seeking clinical care and/or assessment by a healthcare provider related to COVID-19 symptoms should not be tested with a RAT test. RAT testing is not as sensitive as PCR, therefore it has a higher likelihood of false negative results.

The goal of COVID-19 testing in the context of widespread omicron transmission in a highly immunized population is to assist with clinical management and protect those who current research has shown are most at risk of a severe outcome. As the gold standard for COVID-19 diagnostic testing, a PCR test should be used for diagnosing COVID-19 when indicated as a part of clinical assessment.

If someone wants to use RAT tests asymptotically to monitor for COVID-19, how should they use them?

The Yukon's testing strategy doesn't recommend asymptomatic testing. However, we do see that some people still choose to use these tests asymptotically in certain situations for peace of mind before doing higher-risk activities. If speaking to patients planning to use tests in this way, there have been further studies (conducted by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and the U.S. National Institutes for Health) on how serial testing with rapid antigen tests can be used to detect asymptomatic infection with 79% sensitivity. However, it requires 3 tests to be completed over 4 to 5 days, each test 48 hours apart. Health Canada agrees with this updated serial testing strategy. Full details available at: <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/covid19-industry/medical-devices/testing/notice-updated-policy-rapid-antigen-self-testing-devices-serial.html>