Overview of the Provincial Antigen Screening Program

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Objectives

In this session you will learn:

- What the Provincial Antigen Screening Program is and what program participation means for your retirement home
- An overview of the Panbio™ COVID-19 antigen rapid test
- The clinical guidance on rapid antigen testing
- About the experiences from retirement homes who have conducted on-site rapid antigen testing
- How to get started with antigen screening

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The Provincial Antigen Screening Program

What is new?

- Supported by new guidance released February 17th, the Ministry of Health has launched a new Provincial Antigen Screening Program which:
  - Builds on the success and learnings of the antigen screening pilot project launched in November 2020, which included 57 retirement home sites
  - Builds on efforts undertaken in January 2021 to expand access for retirement homes in high community transmission areas and support testing for both staff and essential visitors, resulting in 180 retirement homes being approved to participate
  - Introduces new program agreements to ensure accountability while providing more flexibility/access to testing through exemptions to the Laboratory and Specimen Collection Centre Licensing Act, 1990
- The Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility is supporting roll-out of the new program to the retirement home sector starting with:
  - Outreach on February 22 to retirement homes that were previously approved to participate or expressed interest by submitting a template – program agreements required by February 26th
  - Outreach anticipated the week of March 1 to the rest of the sector

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Note: Participation is voluntary but strongly recommended

Goals of the Provincial Antigen Screening Program

- Reduce the spread of COVID-19 and to support essential and vulnerable workplaces to safely stay open.
- Enhance existing routine screening measures for asymptomatic employees in priority settings.
- Allow for workplaces to proactively identify cases of COVID-19 that may have otherwise been missed, supporting employee safety and continuity in a variety of workplaces.

Note: Rapid antigen screening **should not** replace existing workplace infection prevention and control measures.

What Does Participation in the Program Mean for my Retirement Home?

- The provincial government will provide participating retirement homes with the required number of tests to meet sector-specific testing guidelines for free, dependent on available inventory
- As per the new Program Agreement, retirement homes are required to:
  - Use test kits for the intended purpose and not resell
  - Enter a small set of data on a weekly basis into a centralized reporting database to support the evaluation of the program
  - Ensure compliance with all applicable laws, provincial or federal directives, and provincial or federal guidance, including provincial Guidance on Antigen Screening and IPAC guidelines
  - Provide all other human resources and equipment/supplies (other than the test kits) at the participant's own cost
  - Ensure that the person performing COVID-19 point-of-care antigen screening using the Test Kits at the Participant's site is a health professional that has the appropriate knowledge, skills, judgment, and oversight to perform the test correctly

Update (March 5, 2021): Changes to Ministry of Health guidance allow for any trained individuals to perform point-of-care antigen testing.

What Staff does a Retirement Home Need to Participate in the Program?

- In signing the program agreement, the retirement home will be temporarily exempt from Regulation 682 and Regulation 683 under the Laboratory and Specimen Collection Centre Licensing Act, 1990
- This change is expected to allow for a broader range of health professionals to perform rapid antigen screening as part of the Provincial Antigen Screening Program
- Health professionals may include both regulated health professionals, as well as non-regulated health workers, which could include, but are not limited to personal support workers

  Update (March 5, 2021): Changes to Ministry of Health guidance allow for any trained individuals to perform point-of-care antigen testing.
- **Retirement homes will be responsible for ensuring individuals delivering antigen tests have the knowledge, skills, and judgement to perform the test**

Current Retirement Home Surveillance Testing Policy

- Since June 2020, all retirement home staff, home and community care staff and personal care service providers are required to receive bi-weekly testing through PCR tests
  - Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility (MSAA) Deputy Minister's Memo, issued June 9, 2020
  - Ontario Retirement Home COVID-19 Visiting Policy, last updated December 11, 2020
- This guidance may be updated. Once released, retirement homes must ensure compliance under the terms of the new program agreement
- Retirement homes co-located with long-term care homes are expected to follow the more restrictive visiting policy, including any testing requirements, if the two homes are not physically and operationally independent
  - Operationally and physically independent means that there are separate entrances and no mixing of residents or staff between the retirement home and long-term care home
- For more information about surveillance testing in long-term care homes visit:
  - www.ontario.ca/page/covid-19-long-term-care-home-surveillance-testing
  - www.ontario.ca/page/covid-19-long-term-care-homes-in-areas-visitor-restrictions

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Surveillance Testing Frequency

- In accordance with the Ministry of Health's guidance, retirement homes using rapid antigen testing should ensure that staff, volunteers and essential visitors receive testing:
  - 2-3 times per week in grey, red, orange and yellow zones
  - 1-2 times per week in green zones
- Individuals entering retirement homes at a lesser frequency should complete an antigen test upon entry to the retirement home
- If recommended frequencies are met, antigen testing can be used as an alternative to bi-weekly PCR-based surveillance testing
- If retirement homes are not using antigen testing or are unable to meet the prescribed antigen testing frequencies, surveillance testing should continue bi-weekly (i.e., once every 14 days) through a PCR test

What Support is Available for Retirement Homes Participating in this Program?

- Ontario Health has developed an Onboarding Guide to support sites in implementing COVID-19 rapid antigen tests:
  - Onboarding process overview
  - Clinical guidance
  - Specimen collection tips
  - Licensing and regulations
  - Best practices for point-of-care testing
  - Site set-up, supplies
  - Kit ordering considerations
  - Information sheets (FAQ) for individuals being tested and for staff operating a clinic
  - Recommended steps for implementing a clinic (operating procedures)
  - Go-live readiness checklist

As your organization begins to implement rapid antigen testing, participating workplaces will receive information on additional training materials made available by Ontario Health.

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Overview of COVID-19 Antigen Rapid Tests

Comparison of COVID-19 Tests

	Rapid Antigen Screening	Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) Diagnostic Testing
Description	• The antigen test looks for proteins from the COVID-19 virus	• PCR tests show if someone is infected with COVID-19
Use	• Screening of asymptomatic individuals with no known exposure to COVID-19 • Repeat/routine screening • Not for use in outbreaks	• Diagnosis • Symptomatic individuals and known close contacts.
Location	• On-site	• Assessment Centre • Pharmacy (then shipped to a lab for processing)
Timing	• Results in 15-20 minutes	• Results in about 1-2 days
Accuracy	• Higher rates of false positive and false negative results • Positive results need to be followed up with a PCR test to confirm	• Highly accurate

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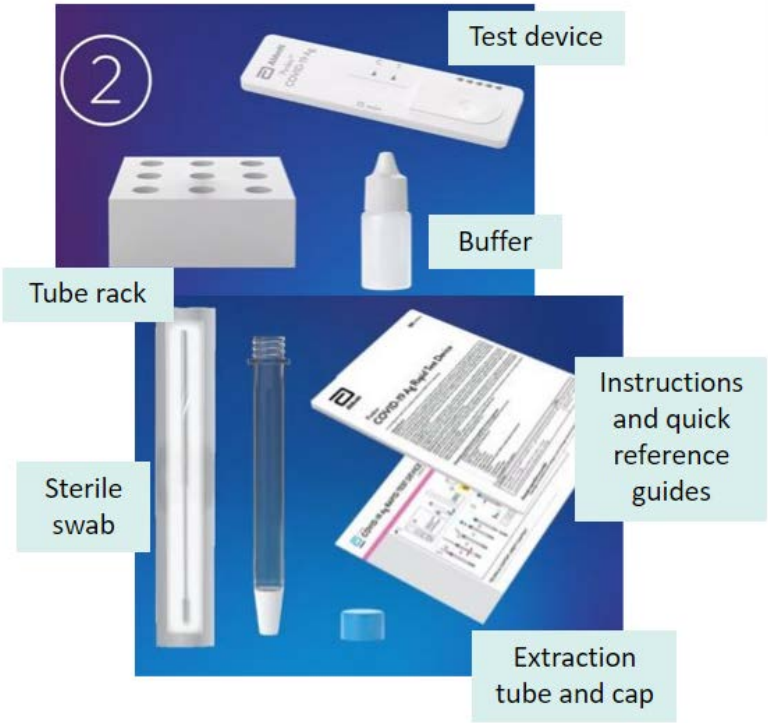
Note: In general, individuals who have previously been infected with and recovered from COVID-19 should not undergo repeat testing/antigen screening, unless otherwise directed by local public health or their health care provider as per their symptom and exposure history.

The Panbio™ COVID-19 Ag Rapid Test

	Panbio™ COVID-19 Ag Rapid Test
	
Type of Test	Antigen Testing
Model of Delivery	**Screening**
Manufacturer	Abbott
Swab Type	Nasopharyngeal or Nasal
Result TAT	15-20 mins
Sensitivity	>70%*
Specificity	>95%
Regulatory Approval	Health Canada=Approved



In medical diagnosis, test sensitivity is the ability of a test to correctly identify those with the disease, whereas test specificity is the ability of the test to correctly identify those without the disease.

*Test sensitivity varies depending on the screening population (symptomatic vs. asymptomatic) and the specimen collection technique. PHO reports sensitivity between 25-65% for asymptomatic population.

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BD Veritor™ COVID-19 Antigen Testing System

BD Veritor™

Analyzer

Test device

Swabs

Positive and negative controls

Extraction reagent

Type of Test	Antigen test
Swab Type	Nasal, Deep Nasal, Combined throat and bilateral nares
Result TAT	15 mins
Performance	Sensitivity 84%*, Specificity 100*

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*Manufacturer reported results based on symptomatic persons

Clinical Guidance - When can Antigen Screening be Used?

- Antigen screening must be conducted in accordance with the Ministry of Health's COVID-19 Guidance: Considerations for Rapid Antigen Screening.
- Rapid antigen testing is used for screening purposes only and **should NOT** be used for diagnosing someone with symptoms or exposure to COVID-19.
- Rapid antigen screening may only be performed using a testing device that has been approved by Health Canada and is available in Ontario.

Eligibility:

- **Asymptomatic employees** who have passed the initial standard screening conducted within the retirement home.
- No suspected or confirmed outbreak in the retirement home.

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Clinical Guidance Update

- As of March 5, 2021, changes to Ministry of Health guidance allow for any trained individuals to perform point-of-care antigen testing, in accordance with the product manufacturer's label. Supervised self-swabbing for point-of-care antigen testing is now also permitted.
- **Note:** Nasopharyngeal swab is a controlled act and can only be performed by certain regulated health care professionals.

Clincial Guidance – What types of swabs are found in Panbio™ kits?

- As of February 2021, Ontario's inventory of the Abbott Panbio™ test kits comes with either nasopharyngeal (NP) swabs or nasal swabs.
  - Either swab kit type may be distributed based on available inventory
  - Program participants should only specify the kit type in their order if they specifically wish to receive a kit with nasopharyngeal swabs

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Clinical Guidance – What are the Appropriate Specimen Collection Techniques for Antigen Screening?

- Rapid antigen testing can be performed using one of the following specimen collection techniques:
  - a nasopharyngeal swab* (highest sensitivity),
  - a combined swab of throat and both nares,
  - a deep nasal swab, or
  - a nasal swab.

Note: As of March 5, 2021, changes to Ministry of Health guidance allow for trained individuals to perform point-of-care antigen testing, in accordance with the product manufacturer's label. Supervised self-swabbing for point-of-care antigen testing is now also permitted.

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*A nasopharyngeal specimen collection can only be done with a NP swab.

Clinical Guidance – Who Can Perform the Swabbing and Testing?

- The Ministry of Health has addressed resourcing challenges expressed by early adopters of rapid antigen testing by making regulatory changes to allow health professionals, or other trained individuals, to perform rapid antigen testing.

- Swabbing:
  - nasopharyngeal (highest sensitivity) → **Certain regulated health professionals**
  - combined specimen of throat and both nares
  - deep nasal
  - nasal

  } **Health professionals, or other trained individuals**

- Test processing can also be done by trained individuals, in accordance with the product manufacturer's label.

Clinical Guidance – What to Communicate about Antigen Screening Test Results

- **Positive Results**:
  - Tell the individual that the positive result is preliminary and PCR testing is required for confirmation.
  - Tell the individual that they must self-isolate and follow public health guidance until the result of the confirmatory, lab-based PCR test is known.
  - Ensure confirmatory PCR testing is booked and performed within 24 hours.
  - Administrator/rapid testing lead to report the preliminary positive result to the local public health unit as soon as possible.

- **Negative Results:**
  - Tell the individual that the result is negative but a false negative is possible.
  - Individuals should continue to follow all infection prevention and control measures in place.

Clinical Guidance – COVID-19 Vaccines

- Vaccinated individuals should not be excluded from rapid antigen screening initiatives, as it is unknown at this time if they can still transmit COVID-19, despite being vaccinated.
- Individuals who have received a COVID-19 vaccine, regardless of whether they received one or two doses, are still able to receive an accurate result from a rapid antigen test.
- Based on a review of available evidence and expert guidance, regular testing will remain important even after individuals have received their COVID-19 vaccines.
- Rapid antigen testing is expected to continue for the foreseeable future.

Clinical Guidance – Variants of Concern

- The Panbio™ COVID-19 Ag Rapid Test has been proven to detect the B.1.1.7 variant (known as 'UK variant'). Other variants are also suspected of being detectable based on the way the test works.

- The test detects the nucleocapsid protein rather than the spike protein (where most of the variant mutations occur) and therefore is not expected to be affected by the differences in variant lineages.

Ordering Panbio™ Kits

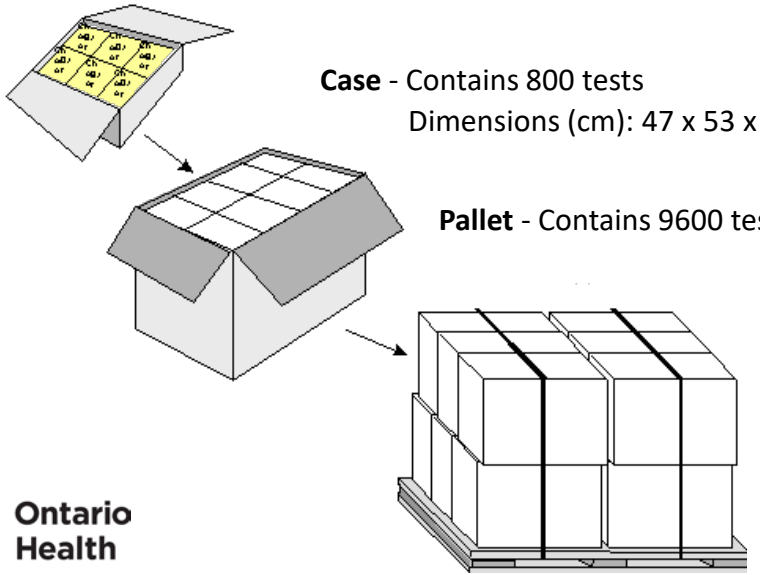
Ordering Process

- Requests for Panbio™ rapid tests can be submitted through the following link: https://ehealthontario.on.ca/en/health-care-professionals/digital-health-services.
- Two forms are available. Use the form that corresponds with the region your retirement home is located:
  - Central, East, North and Toronto Regions, OR
  - West Region
- Once all the relevant information is entered on the form (contact/shipping, details, etc.), requestors will enter '*Panbio for testing <# of staff members> across <# of homes>*' on the swab ordering portion of the form.
- Regional Supply Chain team members will validate the requests before kits are shipped.

Ordering Considerations for Panbio

- Panbio kits must be stored above 2°C and below 30°C. Do NOT freeze kits.
- Orders should be placed when there is between 7 and 14 days of supplies left.

Inner box - Contains 25 tests
Dimensions (cm): 23 x 12.5 x 9



Case - Contains 800 tests
Dimensions (cm): 47 x 53 x 39

Pallet - Contains 9600 tests (12 cases)

Note:

- For large orders: place orders in multiples of 800 kits (i.e., 800, 1600, 2400, etc.)
- For orders under 400 kits: place orders in multiples of 25 (25 tests per box).
- This will help speed up shipments.
- Encouraged to order 1 month supply at a time.

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The Employer Antigen Screening Pilot – Retirement Home Experiences

Employer Rapid Antigen Screening Pilot: Key Findings

- Most employers and employees felt an increased sense of protection and security in the workplace. Most employers felt implementation went smoothly, and most employees had no concerns with participating.
- Overall, the number of positives detected was low relative to the number of tests performed - the overall disruption to workplaces may be minimal.
- Asymptomatic screening with antigen tests was able to find COVID-19 cases that otherwise would have otherwise gone undetected.

"Overall the program went well and did identify a few asymptomatic employees and allowed us to implement the proper protocols."

"The tool allowed us to catch at least 4 positive asymptomatic cases (just in the last month) before they came into the building and exposed the residents."

"[Employees] felt a sense of trust in the company by us putting in a greater effort to keep our workplace and community safe."

"I believe this is an effective, if not essential, method for keeping each other, our clients and ourselves safe and am grateful to have this service"

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Chartwell: Successes

- Senior management buy-in and commitment to success – providing oversight by reviewing employee rates on surveillance testing
- Commitment by leadership in the homes to take on additional responsibilities
- Covid-19 fatigue – our homes pulling together to do what they can to end lockdowns and other pandemic measures
- Meeting with the homes prior to the pilot start to ensure all homes understand what is required and to review tools and resources that were developed – identify gaps as a group and problem solve prior to starting the pilot
- Sustainability – having regular check ins with the homes individually (every 2 weeks) to encourage the staff, assist with troubleshooting problems and to provide support; bring group together to share what has worked well and challenges so they can support one another and provide tips for success
- Although a slow uptake by the staff to participate in the pilot, momentum began to build with leadership providing support, encouragement and incentives

Chartwell: Challenges

- Obtaining a medical directive for Retirement Homes
- Logistics – being nimble to respond to changes to the testing requirements based on colour-coded zones, especially when frequency increases from 2 times to up to 3 times/week
- Setting up testing area and ensuring adequate inventory of supplies
- Resources – staffing availability for testing essential visitors and LHIN workers in addition to staff – either pulled from daily work or having to come in extra hours
- Environmental costs with respect to waste and biohazard pick up
- Requirement to perform NP swabs in addition to the Panbio
- Collecting data and reporting internally as well as externally to the Ministry
- Staff motivation to participate in the pilot
- Delays on starting pilot or interruption due to outbreak status

Chartwell: Lessons Learned

- Be ready to provide support
- Offering test in-house vs. having to access an outside testing clinic resulted in an overall higher participation rate in testing
- Gather all resources and tools in advance and provide to the homes with a “Go-Live” call so everyone is prepared and homes can hit the ground running with the implementation
- Review the logistical needs especially staffing needs and determine what operational supports are required to perform the testing

Getting Started

Key Site Requirements for Rapid Antigen Screening

Rapid testing lead:
An administrator, director of care or other lead to oversee the rapid testing implementation at your retirement home.

Testing Personnel: Health professionals, or other trained individuals, to perform the swabbing and operating the rapid testing device.

Confirmatory testing: Establish a process for PCR testing, e.g., direct individuals with preliminary positive results from the rapid testing to closest assessment centre or participating community lab for confirmatory lab-based testing.

Ongoing quality support and capacity: Staff conducting the screening clinic should review the training session to ensure the antigen testing is run appropriately and the required quality checks are performed on the test kits.

Data reporting: Sites are required to submit minimum data elements requested on a regular basis (e.g. weekly reporting of volumes).

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Next Steps to Implement an Antigen Screening Program

1. Review the Provincial Antigen Screening Program documents.
2. Review the onboarding guide, training modules and go-live checklist.
3. Review the procedures for using rapid antigen tests.
4. Identify a testing lead who will oversee implementation of antigen screening.
5. Order and receive antigen test kits, following instructions for your sector.

Available Resources and Additional Support

Training Resources Available from Ontario Health

- ontariohealth.ca/panbio
- Training modules:

Title	Links to Training Sessions (most sessions were conducted as live webinars, and are updated with changes to Ministry of Health guidance, effective March 5, 2021)	Presentation (slides only)
Overview of the Provincial Antigen Screening Program	Access training session	Access training slides
Best Practices for Point-of-Care Testing	Access training session	Access training slides
Documenting and Reporting Results	Access training session	Access training slides
Module – Specimen Collection Techniques	Access module	Not applicable
Module – Self-collection	Access module	Access instructions

- Participants should also receive:
  - Onboarding guide
  - Ordering instructions

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Additional Resources

- Abbott – Helpful documents and video demonstrations: https://www.globalpointofcare.abbott/en/product-details/panbio-covid-19-ag-antigen-test.html#
- Public Health Ontario fact sheet: Abbott Panbio™ COVID-19 Antigen Rapid Test: Biosafety Considerations: https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/lab/covid-19-abbott-panbio-antigen-rapid-test-biosafety.pdf?la=en

Questions?

- For more information about this presentation, contact covid19testing@ontariohealth.ca
- For questions regarding the program, surveillance testing policy, frequency of antigen testing and eligible groups, contact RHInquiries@ontario.ca

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