Test To Protect – Information Sheet for Health Care Workers and Physicians


- Saskatchewan has created a strategy to expand rapid antigen testing for COVID-19 in asymptomatic individuals in a variety of settings across the province.
- Testing will be voluntary but it is an important way for everyone to know their status and to protect themselves and those around them and help maintain a safe workplace and home environment.
- This ability to Test to Protect will be key to maintaining healthcare system capacity, preventing unchecked surges of the variants of concern (VOCs) and keeping the workplace safe. It’s important that everyone be tested, and tested regularly.

Why Are We Focusing on Testing?

- The presence of new variants across Canada means an elevated risk of transmission for everyone. You can read the latest update on the variants of concern and how we are testing for them here.
- Because these variant strains are more transmissible, it’s more important than ever before to be vigilant and get tested to help protect yourself and those around you. Testing is an important element of a multi-layered approach that will usher us through the pandemic, along with proper personal protective equipment (PPE) use, limiting gatherings, keeping 2 metres away from others when in public and wearing a mask, washing your hands often, staying home if you are unwell and getting vaccinated when it’s available to you.

Information Resources

The Saskatchewan Health Authority (SHA) has a number of resources available to all health care workers (HCW) and physicians regarding testing information.

Abbott ID Now, Abbott Panbio, BD Veritor Testing Devices
The SHA Testing, Screening, Treatment and Medical Directives website houses clinical procedures documents, Frequently Asked Questions, reference guides, training checklists, and informational presentations on each of these devices.

COVID-19 Testing Information
Information about when and where to get tested can be found on the Ministry of Health’s COVID-19 website.

There’s also a helpful handout for patients, clients, residents and staff – What to Know About Getting Tested for COVID-19.

COVID-19 Drive-Thru Testing
Information on our drive-thru testing sites, as well as wait times for the drive-thru sites can be found on the SHA COVID-19 Drive-Thru Wait Times website.

Testing Strategy Information
Any updates on the testing strategy will be posted on the SHA Testing, Screening, Treatment and Medical Directives website.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)
Test to Protect - Terms You May Hear and What They Mean

Test to Protect
This is the vision or motto of the new testing strategy. Testing is an important way to detect the COVID-19 virus early and stop the spread. It’s important that everyone be tested, and tested regularly as knowing your status is one of the best ways to protect yourself and those around you.

Types of Tests
We are focused on providing two kinds of COVID-19 tests but there are different vendor brands that we are using.

- **COVID-19 Diagnostic test (In Laboratory testing, GeneXpert and Abbott ID Now POCT):** PCR (polymerase chain reaction) test that can confirm the presence of the SARS-CoV-2 virus
  - ID Now in Acute Care settings as a point of care testing device – Abbott is the vendor brand

- **COVID-19 Screening test (Abbott Panbio and BD Veritor):** Rapid antigen test that sorts persons without symptoms who probably are not infected, from those who need to be further investigated. A screening test is not intended to be diagnostic. Individuals experiencing symptoms or those who have had a positive screening test must be referred for diagnostic testing and assessment.
  - Panbio and Veritor will be used for- Abbott and BD are the vendor brand
    - Continuing Care resident screening
    - SHA staff member screening
    - Community/Public screening
    - Long Term Care Homes
    - Personal Care Homes
    - Shelters/Detox
    - Non-SHA Agencies, Organizations and Industries

COVID Variants
Variants of concern are collections of mutations in the COVID-19 virus. The mode of transmission (aerosol droplets and on shared surfaces) and the symptoms are the same. Older residents and those with underlying health conditions continue to be those at greatest risk of severe illness and death which is why it is so important for everyone to get tested and know their status so that you can protect yourself and others around you.

Healthcare Worker (HCW) and healthcare settings
The definition of HCW for this program includes:

- SHA practitioners and staff working within SHA facilities;
- Licensed health care professionals working in community settings;
- Staff and volunteer caregivers working in congregate living situations (including long term care and personal care homes);
- Staff employed in blood collection centres involved in the collection and distribution of the blood supply chain.
Community settings
Long Term Care Homes, Personnel Care Homes, Shelters, Group Homes, Detox, Police, Fire, EMS, Pharmacies and Dental operations have been approved to access supplies of antigen tests provided by the federal allocations. Other agencies, organizations or industries will require ministry approval to proceed.

Vulnerable population settings
Vulnerable populations are typically made up of two groups of people; socially vulnerable and medically vulnerable. Definitions or descriptors of both groups are below:

- **Social vulnerability**: Linked to a lack of access to education, economic resources, health care services, and social networks. Cultural differences among groups, such as language use and belief systems, also affect vulnerability. Vulnerable people in a society can include—people living in poverty, Indigenous people, children and youth, older adults, people with disabilities, immigrants and refugees, and LGBTQ people, to name a few. Within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and other health issues, these groups of people can be described as **socially vulnerable**.

- **Medical vulnerability**: People who are medically vulnerable, such as older adults, people with underlying health conditions, and people with disabilities, have various physical factors which may increase the likelihood of contracting coronavirus and/or poor outcomes if they have COVID-19 – and can also live in social circumstances which impact their COVID-19 risks and outcomes. Therefore, a person can be both medically and socially vulnerable.

Testing hesitancy
We know there are reasons that people are hesitant to get tested.

“I heard it hurts.”

“I don’t have any symptoms so why would I get tested?”

“I’ve been following all the guidelines, so has my family and I feel fine. Why would I get tested?”

“I’m tired of COVID and hearing about it. I don’t want to get tested.”

There is no one element of the fight against COVID that is a magic bullet including the vaccine. Even as more and more people get vaccinated, we will need to continue to take personal responsibility for our safety and the safety of others by following public health orders and aggressively testing to stamp out COVID-19. Getting tested and knowing your status is one of the best ways you can protect yourself and those around you.

Test to Protect At Home Testing Program for Health care Workers
Saskatchewan has created a strategy to expand rapid antigen testing for COVID-19 in asymptomatic individuals in a variety of settings across the province. We are using rapid antigen testing as a screening test; to sort people without symptoms who probably are not infected, from those who need to be further investigated. An antigen detects viral molecules and can produce results in less than 30 minutes.
With more contagious variants now starting to show up in our province, it is more important than ever to expand our testing options and capacity in order to limit the spread of these highly contagious viruses. Because variant strains are more transmissible, receiving point-of-care testing can detect COVID-19 to protect individuals and stop the spread to others.

Part of this expansion of testing includes providing an option for health care workers to receive training to perform rapid antigen testing, at home, on themselves and members of their household. The SHA will be doing a pilot program at Regina Pasqua Hospital and Regina General Hospital beginning the week of March 29 to test the training and uptake of testing kits. The training and testing kits will be rolled out to the rest of the SHA once the pilot is complete. More information on this program will be available once the pilot is complete.

The option to take the training and participate in at home testing will be voluntary, but by knowing your status you can yourself and those around you and help maintain a safe workplace and home environment. It’s important for everyone to be tested and tested regularly.