

Ontario Deploys Rapid Testing to Support COVID-19 Response

New Technology is a Gamechanger in Significantly Improving Screening for the Virus

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Office of the Premier

TORONTO — The Ontario government has deployed new COVID-19 rapid tests to provide faster results in regions of high transmission and rural and remote areas. As an additional tool to help keep essential workers safe, rapid tests will also be used to screen staff in long-term care homes and select workplaces. These new tests will provide Ontarians with more access to innovative testing options and will help to quickly identify and manage outbreaks to stop the spread of COVID-19.

Details were released today by Premier Doug Ford, Christine Elliott, Deputy Premier and Minister of Health, and Dr. Merrilee Fullerton, Minister of Long-Term Care.

"These new rapid tests are gamechangers in the fight against COVID-19," said Premier Ford. "This new technology can provide test results in hours, even minutes, instead of days. We're deploying them as quickly as possible to protect patients, long-term care residents, and the frontline heroes who care for them. These new tools will ensure that Ontario remains the leader in testing in Canada to help stop the spread of this deadly virus."

Ontario has received approximately 98,000 ID NOW tests that are initially being used in hospitals and assessment centres in rural and remote communities, as well as to test people as part of early outbreak investigations in hotspot regions where there are high concentrations of COVID-19 cases. Two hospitals are using ID NOW, with 20 additional hospitals preparing to launch rapid testing. Hospitals will be able to test people, such as staff and patients, who are either symptomatic or have been in close contact with someone who has COVID-19.

"Our government strongly advocated for the approval of these rapid tests to help provide timely access to testing for Ontarians who need it the most," said Minister Elliott. "These tests are helping to improve access to testing in our most underserved communities and allow us to better detect and contain any outbreaks. We are continuously working to expand our testing capacity and evaluate new and emerging technologies to provide safe testing options for a greater number of people."

ID NOW tests continue to be distributed in Simcoe Muskoka, Southwestern Ontario and Eastern Ontario, and the program will be expanded to other areas of the province beginning in December. Continued rollout of this test is planned for in Toronto and Peel and work is underway with Ontario Health and local public health units to support rapid testing deployment across the province. Ontario also continues to work closely with Toronto Public Health and Peel Regional Health Unit to bring rapid testing into the regions' outbreak response, using rapid testing to help with early identification and investigation of outbreaks.

The province has also received 1.2 million Panbio rapid antigen tests that will support a screening program for long-term care homes and other workplaces. To date, Panbio tests have been deployed to six long-term care operators for potential deployment in over 30 long-term care homes, 27 retirement homes, eight hospitals, and 11 industry partners such as Ontario Power Generation, Air Canada and Magna, with plans to expand further across province. Ontario is expecting to receive up to 1.5 million more Panbio tests by the end of December.

Over the next number of weeks, select long-term care homes will use the Abbott Panbio rapid antigen tests to help inform future deployment across the sector.

"Since day one of COVID-19, our top priority has been to protect the health and well-being of Ontarians, including long-term care residents," said Minister Fullerton. "These rapid tests can help long-term care homes get results immediately allowing them to act faster to prevent COVID-19 from entering the home."

Panbio tests will also be used in a broader eight-week pilot for participating employers in the private, public and non-profit sectors, prioritizing access for health care settings, essential frontline settings, and congregate settings. This pilot program is an important opportunity to learn about the value of antigen screening for asymptomatic workers in a range of workplace settings and will inform future decisions about safely and fully re-opening the economy. Participating employers would cover associated costs of delivering antigen rapid tests including human resource expenses and ensure testing follows guidelines as set by the Chief Medical Officer of Health.

The province continues to ensure that anyone who needs a test can get a test and receive their results as quickly as possible. Anyone who falls within the current Provincial Testing Guidance should continue to seek publicly funded testing, available at participating pharmacies and assessment centres. If you have COVID-19 symptoms, you should get tested at an assessment centre.

As both ID NOW and Panbio tests are new, they will be carefully evaluated and used in alignment with guidance from Health Canada.

Quick Facts

- The ID NOW test uses molecular testing with a nasal, nasopharyngeal or throat swab. Molecular testing detects genetic material of COVID-19 to diagnose people with symptoms.
- The Panbio test uses antigen testing with a nasopharyngeal swab only. Antigen testing detects specific proteins from the virus to screen and identify people who need further testing.
- Rapid tests must be performed at a laboratory or specimen collection centre licensed under the Laboratory and Specimen Collection Centre Licensing Act (LSCCLA) or by certain regulated health professionals that are specifically exempt from the licensing requirements of the LSCCLA. Ontario has also released [guidance](#) for individuals or organizations that choose to participate in COVID-19 testing that falls outside of the public health care system, to ensure there is appropriate oversight and consumer protection and that public resources are supporting public health initiatives.
- The launch of rapid testing is part of the province's fall preparedness plan, [Keeping Ontarians Safe: Preparing for Future Waves of COVID-19](#), to enhance and expand efforts to quickly test and identify new cases of COVID-19.
- Ontario has completed over 5.8 million tests to date, more tests than all Canadian provinces and territories combined.
- Testing is available by appointment for those within provincial testing guidance at assessment centres, participating pharmacies and specimen collection centres. Please visit [Ontario.ca/covidtest](https://ontario.ca/covidtest) to find a testing location and for eligibility criteria to be tested.
- It is still critically important for all Ontarians to follow public health measures to stay safe and stop the spread of COVID-19—wear a mask when required, stay two metres apart from people outside of your household, wash your hands frequently, stay home if you are not feeling well, and download the COVID Alert mobile app.

Quotes

"As a global leader in diagnostics, Abbott is committed to supporting Ontario's and Canada's efforts to fight the COVID-19 pandemic. Our ID NOW and Panbio rapid tests provide healthcare professionals with

fast, reliable and affordable tools that can enable testing at mass scale so that those who are infected can be identified quickly and help slow the spread of virus."

- Daniel St.-Pierre
General Manager of Canada, Rapid Diagnostics, Abbott

Additional Resources

- [Ontario Delivers \\$2.8 Billion COVID-19 Fall Preparedness Plan](#)
 - COVID Alert is available for free use and download from the Apple and Google Play app stores. This new app lets users know if they may have been exposed to the virus.
 - Visit Ontario's [website](#) to learn more about how the province continues to protect the people of Ontario from COVID-19.
 - [Symptoms, Screening, and Testing Resources](#)
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