

Rapid Antigen Tests (RATs) FAQ

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Overview

What is the extended access period for accessing RATs?

The extended access period (EAP) began July 1st, 2023, after the wind down of existing Rapid Antigen Testing Programs on June 30, 2023.

The extended access period is marked for populations identified by the Ministry (e.g people who identify as First Nations, Inuit and Métis, temporary foreign workers, Ontarians in congregate settings and High Priority Communities) to have continuous access to RATs *free of charge*. These population are at higher-risks for severe outcomes if contracted with COVID-19

To support ongoing access to COVID-19 testing through the fall/winter 2023 (and viral season), Public Health Units (PHUs) are distributing RATs to their local communities. To also prepare for respiratory viral season, patients may be also able to access RATs from regular health care channels (i.e primary care providers, pharmacies)

What is the goal of distributing RATs during the extended access period?

The goal is to remove barriers of COVID-19 testing and to plan ahead of an outbreak and treatment.

RATs are accessible tests that can be done at home, removing the barriers of going to community lab and awaiting results. The majority of Ontarians have begun to access therapeutics after receiving a positive RAT – indicating testing preference.

Easy access to rapid testing allows for individuals to receive therapeutics sooner, and help high-risk populations conveniently access testing when needed during respiratory viral season.

Can we collaborate with health partners to distribute the RATs?

Yes. PHUs are encouraged to make RATs available to their communities by bundling distribution into existing services or through collaboration with local partners (i.e availability at civic centers or libraries).

PHUs may develop strategies to support access to testing, including allowing RAT pick up at PHU offices during operating hours, and/or making them available through other public facing offices and programs in their region.

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How long will RATs be available through this program?

EAP began on July 1st, 2023 and will continue through the fall/winter respiratory viral season.

Ontario's testing strategy will remain responsive to COVID-19 viral activity to ensure that those at highest risk of severe outcomes and those caring for them have timely access to testing. In addition to RATs, publicly funded PCR access will continue to focus on high-risk groups and individuals. We are working with pharmacies to facilitate expanded access to PCR testing through local pharmacies, helping Ontarians to connect with care closer to home.

Ontarians are advised to stay home when sick and until they are feeling better. If an individual is at higher-risk of severe COVID-19, it is recommended that they contact their health care provider or locate their nearest pharmacy to facilitate access to PCR testing at <https://www.ontario.ca/assessment-centre-locations>.

Are pharmacy and grocery retailers still distributing RATs?

The provincial RAT program ended on June 30, 2023. Retailers were invited to place final orders in June and are currently distributing their remaining supplies to the public.

Given the program's end, the [RAT locator tool](#) is being decommissioned. The public should be directed to the [Rapid Testing for At-Home Use](#) website for the most up-to-date information on RAT access in Ontario.

Ordering

How do we order RATs?

PHUs can order RATs at their desired frequency, through the [PPE Supply Portal](#) overseen by the Ministry of Public and Business Services Delivery. If your PHU is not already registered for an account through this Portal, or for any questions regarding orders and shipment, please contact sco.supplies@ontario.ca

How many RATs should I order?

Quantities depend on population demands. Orders should consider preparedness for the upcoming fall/ winter respiratory season, community demand, and on-site storage capacity.

Please note that the Ministry is responsible for approving order numbers.

What types of RATs will we receive?

Currently, the provincial supply of RATs includes a series of brands and models – all have been by Health Canada for home use. PHUs will be able to select the order volume and delivery cadence of their choice but will *not* be able to select a specific brand or model.

Miscellaneous

Who can receive a free RAT from PHUs?

Any Ontarian can receive RAT kit. *PHUs are not expected to screen individuals for eligibility for free RATs.* This is a low-barrier method for providing local communities with access to testing.

Will any assembly of test kits be required?

If PHUs receive boxes with tests separated into their component parts, some assembly will be required. Instructions on how to assemble the component parts can be found in the test kit.

PHU may receive shipments of larger kits (i.e., 20 or 25 per box) and are welcome to distribute these larger kits to individuals or families, as is and based on needs. If PHUs wish to provide individuals with kits in other denominations, some disassembly may be required.

At this time, there are no RAT supply concerns and PHUs are encouraged to provide tests to individuals in denominations that are deemed easiest to distribute.

How do we dispose of unused/ damaged/ expired testing products?

Waste generated from on-site RATs use is considered a hazardous waste under Ontario's [Environmental Protection Act \(EPA\)](#). Waste from these tests is exempt from collection, storage, and transportation requirements as long as the waste is disposed of in Ontario. Unused, damaged, or expired tests cannot be returned to any central government warehouse due to quality control considerations and must be appropriately disposed of at no cost to the Government of Ontario, including Supply Ontario. Organizations are encouraged to review [the Ministry of Environment, Conservation, and Parks \(MECP\) guidelines](#) regarding the proper and safe disposal of waste from RATs.

The ministry cannot provide legal advice on disposal and this information is not and should not be considered legal advice.

Review the manufacturer's instructions for the applicable RATs and review the EPA, its regulations, and additional laws, regulations, or guidance/policies that apply to the management of waste. Consult a lawyer if you have any questions about the application or interpretation of Ontario laws or if you have other legal questions.

RAT FAQ

Can I distribute/ use RAT kits that are soon-to-be/ have expired?

RATs should only be used up to their date of expiry.

Some RATs have received expiry extensions and can be used beyond their printed date, up to the new date of expiry published by the manufacturer. Health Canada has extended the shelf life of many COVID-19 testing products and may continue to do so in the coming months.

Information on manufacturer published [expiry date extensions](#) can be found on the Ontario Health website.

What are the reporting requirements in the case of a positive RAT result?

Per the [COVID-19 Provincial Testing Guidance](#), dated January 25, 2023, which may be updated from time to time*, positive rapid antigen tests no longer require confirmatory PCR testing. Organizations are not required to report rapid antigen test results. Please contact askhealthdata@ontario.ca for further information or questions.

*Note that the COVID-19 Provincial Testing Guidance may be updated as the COVID-19 situation continues to evolve. Please see [Ontario's COVID-19 website](#) for more general information as well as for updates to the COVID-19 Provincial Testing Guidance. In the event of any conflict between the COVID-19 Provincial Testing Guidance and any applicable legislation or orders or directives issued by the Minister of Health or the Chief Medical Officer of Health (CMOH), the legislation, order or directive prevails.