

## Rapid Antigen Testing: Employers' newest tool in preventing the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace

**As of 1 December 2021, businesses can use Rapid Antigen Tests to conduct COVID-19 surveillance on workers. This provides extra protection in the workplace by enabling detection before workers become symptomatic.**

### What is Rapid Antigen Testing?

Unlike COVID-19 tests administered by healthcare professionals (known as **PCR** tests), Rapid Antigen Testing (**RAT**) takes only 10 minutes to provide a test result. The test involves a swab of only the front of the nose, and does not require a deep swab like other forms of nasal testing. This means it can be easily self-administered by workers under a routine testing regime.

RAT is not mandatory for workplaces. It is an optional layer of protection that can run alongside other strategies for preventing the spread of COVID-19, like vaccination, PPE and regular hand washing. Businesses wanting to use RAT will have to pay for it themselves, as it is not funded like PCR testing.

RAT operates as a method of surveillance testing only, and cannot be used to diagnose a worker with COVID-19. This is because it is not as effective as regular testing. If a positive RAT is returned, the worker will need to seek a PCR test from a healthcare professional.

Another qualifier of RAT is that it can only be administered to workers who possess no COVID-19 symptoms at the time of testing (as symptomatic workers are required to get a PCR test as soon as their symptoms emerge). Not everyone who has COVID-19 will show symptoms, so using RAT to test asymptomatic workers can still play an important part in protecting workers.

Note that RAT is not a substitute for testing requirements for workers covered by the COVID-19 Public Health Response (Point-of-care Tests) Order 2021.

### Administering Rapid Antigen Tests

If a worker returns a positive RAT result under routine testing, the worker must complete a second RAT immediately.

#### Procedure for worker following initial positive RAT result

If the second RAT is negative, the initial false positive result should be recorded. The worker can return to work, but should seek a PCR test as soon as possible.

If the second RAT is positive, the worker must self-isolate at home and seek a PCR test.

If the PCR test is negative, the worker can return to work.

If the PCR test is positive, public health will call the worker directly to advise them of the next steps.

#### Procedure for worker's workplace contacts following initial positive RAT result

If a worker returns a second positive RAT result, contacts within the worker's workplace bubble must complete a RAT themselves.

If a contact returns a positive RAT result, they follow the same process as above for workers who return an initial positive RAT result.

If a contact returns a negative RAT result, they must continue daily RAT until the initial worker's PCR results are back. Until then, they must wear appropriate PPE and maintain a 2-metre physical distance from others.

If the initial worker's PCR result is negative, contacts can return to the routine RAT schedule.

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If the initial worker's PCR result is positive, all contacts must self-isolate and follow public health advice.

### Workplace procedures and policies

The Ministry of Health suggests that businesses intending to use RAT should implement a Standard Operating Procedure for routine testing. This should cover:

- who will administer RAT;
- when RAT will be administered, and how often; and
- the equipment needed.

An example of a Standard Operating Procedure can be found on the Ministry of Health website.

Businesses will need to consider if and how they want to administer RAT. Although it is strongly recommended that RAT occurs at the workplace under the supervision of a support person, workers may self-administer at home. If a business chooses to conduct RAT at the workplace, they will need to consider how many people you need to train to do this, and who.

Businesses should also create a workplace policy that clearly communicates the process to follow if a worker is to receive a positive RAT result.

### More information from the Ministry of Health

The Ministry of Health has put together a [Guide for Businesses](#) that provides more information on:

- how to administer a RAT (including video demonstrations);
- approved suppliers of RAT kits;
- posters for businesses planning on implementing RAT;
- additional training support;
- and more.

### Want to know more?

If you have any questions about using RAT in your workplace, please contact our specialist [Employment Team](#).