

January 8, 2024

24-02

**To:** All clinical staff and medical providers, Infection Prevention and Control Practitioners, Medical Health Officers, Emergency Network

**From:** Dr. Amanda Wilmer, Discipline lead, Medical Microbiology  
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**Re: Discontinuation of COVID-19 Rapid Antigen Testing (RAT) in Interior Health**

COVID-19 rapid antigen tests (RAT) are not reliable for diagnosis of COVID-19. On November 21, 2023, the BCCDC and Provincial Laboratory Medicine services issued a memo stating that the BCCDC oversight of COVID-19 RAT has been withdrawn. As such, **COVID-19 RAT testing can no longer be used to direct clinical care or Infection Prevention and Control measures, and must be discontinued immediately in Interior Health affiliated emergency rooms, hospitals, long term care facilities or outpatient settings.**

For symptomatic patients who meet indications for testing, a nasopharyngeal swab must be collected and forwarded to Interior Health Medical Microbiology laboratories for testing. Refer to specimen ordering guidelines for further information.

- Acute care: <https://www.interiorhealth.ca/sites/default/files/PDFS/respiratory-viral-testing-ordering-chart-om-flu-season-acute-care.pdf>
- Long term care: <https://www.interiorhealth.ca/sites/default/files/PDFS/respiratory-viral-testing-ordering-chart-om-flu-season-long-term-care.pdf>

Symptomatic healthcare workers no longer require COVID-19 RAT testing. Updated provincial guidelines provide a more general syndromic approach for returning to work after any viral respiratory illness, so testing is not recommended. Since COVID-19 RAT testing is still available in the community, healthcare workers may continue to use this testing at their discretion, based on individual preference or medical need.

Updated Provincial guidance on return to work after viral respiratory illness can be found online at: <https://picnet.ca/wp-content/uploads/Provincial-Guidance-RTW-and-Exposure-Management-for-HCW-with-VRI-2023-Oct-20.pdf>

### Important Information

- COVID-19 RAT must stop immediately at all Interior Health affiliated sites
- Healthcare workers no longer require COVID-19 RAT testing to direct the return to work process

### Action Required

- Discard COVID-19 RAT kits immediately
- For symptomatic patients, collect a nasopharyngeal swab for respiratory viral testing in the laboratory