

What are COVID-19 rapid antigen tests (RATs)?

RATs detect proteins on the surface of the COVID-19 virus. They can also be used to detect proteins from inside of the virus. These proteins are released after breaking up the virus using a simple soap solution, which is provided with the test. There are situations where using a RAT is helpful, but it is important to remember that RATs only reflect your health status at the time of the test. RATs are easy to use and give results quickly. However, the PCR test performed at a laboratory is still the “gold standard” test because it is more sensitive. There are certain groups that public health will recommend a PCR test rather than a RAT. As well, public health may recommend a confirmation PCR test for some individuals who have a positive RAT. For more information on testing recommendations, visit: <https://www.gov.mb.ca/covid19/testing/index.html>.

Can RATs be used for children?

RATs may be used for children. Most of the RATs authorized for use by Health Canada are for use on individuals two years and older. However, doing a swab on a young child or a child who is unable to stay still can be challenging and caution should be taken. For children, RATs should always be done by an adult. For youth, they should be supervised by an adult. See the instructions provided with the test for any safety instructions to follow if using the test on a child.

Who should not use a self-test or at home test?

Self-testing or at-home testing may not be suitable for everyone. Some examples of when a self-test or at home test is not suitable include:

- individuals who are unable to follow directions – this may be due to their age (chronological or developmental) or if there is a language barrier
- individuals with a health condition that makes them or others assisting them unable to perform a nose swab, do the test, or read the result – e.g., a neurological disease that makes it hard for them to self-swab
- individuals who are unable to safely perform a self-swab or it is unsafe for someone at home to swab them – e.g., difficulties holding their head back or difficulties holding their head still

Individuals who are symptomatic, who are recommended to be tested and who are unable to take a self-test should visit a health care professional or go to a provincial test site. For more information on testing locations, see <https://www.gov.mb.ca/covid19/testing/locations.html> or call Health Links - Info Santé at 204-788-8200 or (toll-free) at 1-888-315-9257.

How do I use the test?

It is very important to follow the steps in the instructions provided with the test you use. There are small differences between different types of RATs, so do not assume the steps are the same. Pay particular attention to how to collect the best sample and the incubation time (the time you need to wait until you read the results). Not following the steps properly, including not waiting long enough or waiting too long to read the test result, can lead to an incorrect result. **Note: a faint line is still a positive.**

All tests are for single-use only which means you can only use each test ONCE and then it must be thrown away in the garbage. Do not use a test (including the swab) more than once or attempt to use one test on different people. Also, if the test has expired, do not use it.

I have symptoms, should I use a RAT?

RATs can be used if you have COVID-19 symptoms. For more information on symptoms of COVID-19, see <https://manitoba.ca/covid19/info-for-mbs.html>.

For most situations, you do not need a confirmatory PCR test if your RAT result is positive. Public health recommends confirmatory PCR only for a few situations. For more information, visit <https://www.gov.mb.ca/covid19/testing/testing-eligibility.html>.

Positive RAT

If your RAT result is positive, you need to consider yourself as having COVID-19 and should isolate.

You should isolate for 5 days after your symptoms start and until you have no fever and your other symptoms have improved over the past 24 hours. You should also avoid non-essential visits to high-risk settings (e.g. personal care homes, health care facilities, etc.) and non-essential contact with individuals at high risk of severe COVID-19 disease for 10 days after your symptoms started. As well, you should wear a well-made, well-fitted mask during this 10-day period if or when you have contact with other people. For more information, see the fact sheet(s) at www.gov.mb.ca/covid19/updates/resources.html#factsheets.

Treatment for COVID-19 is now available for people at higher risk of severe disease, including those who have been vaccinated. Treatment is only effective in the very early phases of infection, so it's important to get referred quickly if you are eligible. If you have a positive RAT please visit <https://gov.mb.ca/covid19/treatment/index.html> for more information and to find out if you are eligible, or call Health Links – Info Santé at 204-788-8200 or (toll-free) at 1-888-315-9257.

Negative RAT

If your RAT result is negative, you may still have COVID-19. You could still be contagious and the test is simply not picking it up. It can take some time for the amount of proteins to increase high enough to be detectable by RAT.

If you used a RAT because you have symptoms, it is recommended you repeat the test again after 24 hours to see if it is still negative. If the repeat test is negative and you have access to another RAT, it is recommended you repeat the test again after another 24 hours.

Although your RATs are negative, you should continue to isolate until you do not have fever and your other symptoms have been improving over the past 24 hours. If you have been told to self-isolate (quarantine), you should also still finish your initial self-isolation (quarantine) period.

Invalid Test

If your RAT result is invalid (doesn't match negative or positive), repeat the test.

I don't have symptoms but I was exposed to someone with COVID-19. Should I use a RAT?

In general, public health does not recommend testing if you do not have symptoms. Symptoms of COVID-19 may take up to 14 days to appear after exposure to the virus, but most individuals develop symptoms within the first week. Most importantly, self-monitor for symptoms and follow the public health guidance including

checking yourself for symptoms, staying home if you are sick, washing your hands frequently, and using additional measures such as physical distancing and wearing a well-made, well-fitted mask when you are sick or based on personal risk and preference.

If there is a case or symptomatic person in your household, while they are isolating, household members should be very cautious and avoid any non-essential visits to high-risk settings and non-essential contact with individuals at high risk for severe disease from COVID-19. All household members should self-monitor for symptoms of COVID-19 for 14 days following exposure. Health care workers should check with their occupational health on any additional requirements before returning to work.

If you develop symptoms, you should isolate immediately and check the sharedhealthmb.ca/covid19/screening-tool/ to see if testing is recommended for you. RATs can be used if you have COVID-19 symptoms and you should follow the guidance in the above section "I have symptoms, should I use a RAT?"

If you use a RAT when asymptomatic, it is important to remember the following:

- **A negative RAT does not rule out COVID-19.** You should continue to follow public health guidance even after a negative test. If you develop symptoms after a recent negative RAT, do not assume that your negative test means you don't have COVID-19. You should isolate and check the online COVID-19 screening tool at <https://sharedhealthmb.ca/covid19/screening-tool/> to see if testing is recommended for you.
 - Anyone with a **positive** COVID-19 test, including a self-administered RAT, should consider themselves as having COVID-19. They should isolate and follow the public health guidance in the fact sheet(s) found here: <https://www.gov.mb.ca/covid19/updates/resources.html#factsheets>
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