



FAQ - rapid tests

Date:

28 October 2020

1. Why are rapid tests being introduced?

Rapid antigen tests have several advantages. A result is available within 15 minutes of the sample being taken, eliminating the uncertainty of having to wait one or two days for a lab result. Patients can be given advice on what to do next directly at the test centre.

In addition, rapid antigen tests can be done at decentralised locations without a lab (medical practices, hospitals and test centres), which is particularly relevant for members of the public. Initial experience with rapid antigen tests shows that the easier and quicker availability of a test result means that people are more willing to be tested and tell those around them. This makes it possible to rapidly detect and isolate more positive cases among the population.

Introducing antigen tests enables broader and more comprehensive testing, which is key from an epidemiological point of view. Using rapid antigen tests also enables PCR testing resources to be deployed on a more focused basis in cases where it is particularly important to exclude an infection (for hospitalised patients, people in vulnerable groups and those who work in healthcare with direct patient contact). At present the absolute priority for Switzerland is to curb the number of cases, and the limited resources must be used to do this.

2. Who will be tested with rapid tests?

The Federal Office of Public Health (FOPH) only foresees the use of rapid antigen tests for people who are deemed to be symptomatic according to the FOPH's criteria and who are not in vulnerable groups. In addition, their symptoms should have first occurred fewer than four days previously. These rapid tests can also be used in outbreak investigations and controls and for non-symptomatic people who have received a notification from the SwissCovid App.

3. Where can a rapid test be done?

Rapid antigen tests can be conducted in medical practices, hospitals and test centres, as well as at some pharmacies.

4. How will the rapid tests be distributed among the cantons?

The rapid antigen tests will be distributed among the cantons according to population size.

5. Who will pay for rapid tests?

The costs of the rapid antigen test are covered by the federal government on the basis of the Epidemics Act, but only for people who the FOPH recommends the test for (sampling criteria). People who do not meet the testing criteria should not be tested.

Further information:

Federal Office of Public Health, Communication and Media Section, www.bag.admin.ch
This publication is also available in German, French and Italian.

6. Rapid tests are less sensitive than PCR tests. Is there not a danger that infected people won't be detected, will have a false sense of security and will infect other people?

Rapid antigen tests are indeed less sensitive than PCR tests. However, this is systematically taken into account in the testing strategy. People who are contagious at the time the sample is taken are detected extremely reliably by rapid antigen tests. This is because the tests are highly sensitive for people who meet the criteria defined by the FOPH. Rapid antigen tests are even more sensitive when it comes to showing whether a person is contagious at the moment the sample is taken. The FOPH has therefore issued recommendations specifying the groups where the tests are very reliable and where they can thus be used to systematically identify contagious people in particular.

7. If the result of my test is positive will I still be contacted by the cantonal medical officer?

Yes. Basically everyone who tests positive should be informed by the cantonal offices responsible. But in certain cases, particularly during a wave of infection, the cantonal office responsible might not be able to contact you immediately. Nevertheless, please remain in isolation. You may be entitled to compensation for loss of earnings if there is no sick leave or homeworking is not possible.

8. Does a negative test result affect the isolation and quarantine requirement?

No. People with symptoms must remain in isolation in accordance with the Instructions on Isolation, in other words until at least 24 hours after their symptoms have stopped. One test alone (a PCR or rapid antigen test) does not exclude an infection. The aim is also to avoid the spread of other respiratory infections to minimise the strain on the health system, as well as to prevent infections that could be interpreted as symptoms of suspected Covid-19.

Regardless of the result of the rapid antigen test, people without symptoms must remain in quarantine. Even so, tests may be carried out on the instructions of a doctor to break infection chains (outbreak investigations and controls).

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