



FAQ - extension of the testing strategy

Date:

27 January 2021

1. For which groups and in which situations does the FOPH now recommend testing?

The FOPH recommends preventative and repeated testing as part of precautionary measures and on people's own responsibility in care homes¹, socio-medical settings² and in organisations providing care and assistance at home.

The extended testing strategy is also intended to help recognise local infection outbreaks early on and contain them. Such infection outbreaks may affect schools, training facilities, as well as other institutions, settings or groups. The federal government will cover the costs, regardless of whether the test is conducted on a precautionary basis, as part of an infection outbreak that has already occurred, or within the framework of a larger uncontrolled infection outbreak. In the case of preventive testing and in the event of a major uncontrolled outbreak of infection (hotspot management), the canton should submit a plan to the FOPH.

2. Why has the testing strategy been extended to these groups and situations?

The extended testing strategy aims to protect people at especially high risk (e.g. in care homes). It should also help recognise local infection outbreaks early on and contain them.

3. Who is responsible for implementing the testing strategy?

The cantons are responsible. The FOPH will support the cantons if required.

4. Are 'precautionary' tests still voluntary or can a test be 'ordered'?

In principle, these tests are still voluntary. In the event of an infection outbreak, however, the competent cantonal authority can order testing.

5. Is workplace testing mandatory?

In principle, testing is still voluntary. Employers are only entitled to test their employees within the limits of mandatory law. Mandatory law covers, for example, protection of the employee's privacy and data protection. The testing must be justified by reasons relating to performance of the work or protection of other employees or third parties (customers, patients). All the circumstances should be taken into account, such as the epidemiological situation and the feasibility and availability of other protective measures.

¹ Employees, visitors, fellow patients

² Dito

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. What role do the new virus variants play in the extension of the testing strategy?

Some of the new virus variants (e.g. B.1.1.7, first identified in the United Kingdom) are particularly infectious. The extended testing strategy should help recognise local infection outbreaks early on, contain and prevent them, and protect people at especially high risk.

7. Should I get tested if I develop symptoms, although I've already been vaccinated?

For people who have been vaccinated and who are showing COVID-19 symptoms, the FOPH recommends a PCR test. For these people, getting tested is just as important as for people who have not been vaccinated.

8. In what cases will my child be tested at school?

In the event of an infection outbreak, the competent cantonal authority can order testing. To reduce the risk of infection outbreaks, the competent cantonal authority may – for prevention and early detection purposes – arrange for repeated testing in settings with a high transmission risk (e.g. schools).

9. Are nurseries affected in the same way as schools?

The same rule applies as for schools (see answer to question 8).

10. What tests can be used?

All coronavirus tests that have been validated by laboratories and satisfy the FOPH's criteria can be used. Until now, the majority of tests are PCR tests and rapid antigen tests, for which the sample is taken through a nose and throat swab. There has only been limited availability of PCR saliva tests that are analysed in a laboratory. Laboratories are currently in the process of gradually scaling up their capacity.

11. Under what circumstances does the federal government cover the costs of tests?

The federal government covers the costs of the tests, provided the conditions are met. For example, precautionary measures must always be complied with. This applies to testing of asymptomatic people to protect people at especially high risk, and in settings with an increased risk of transmission (e.g. schools). Testing asymptomatic people may supplement existing sets of precautionary measures. For testing as part of testing and containment measures in the event of a local infection outbreak, the canton must submit a policy to the FOPH for approval.

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