

6 December 2022

TESTING AND CLINICAL ASSESSMENT

Current testing guidance for the general population is to conduct a self-test RAT if symptoms develop:

- if an individual tests positive, he/she should isolate at home for seven days
- if an individual tests negative and symptoms worsen, repeat the self-test RAT, and contact the healthcare provider.

It is recommended that all household contacts complete a daily self-test RAT for five days after the first case in the household tests positive, and if symptoms develop.

Please refer to case definition and clinical testing guidelines for COVID-19 [here](#). Information on all testing requirements and settings is available in the [Testing Plan and Testing Guidance](#).

Patients should be encouraged to do a self-test RAT at home wherever possible, with support from household members if living with others, before attending a primary care facility. It is also important for general practice to reinforce this message with patients and accept a **self-reported RAT** when triaging patients on the same day as the **self-test RAT**.

Patients should be encouraged to upload their result via My Covid Record, prior to presenting at general practice.

PRIORITY AND VULNERABLE POPULATION GROUPS

When identifying who to test, consideration needs to be given to people from priority and vulnerable population groups, who present to general practice with symptoms consistent with COVID-19 in their community (cultural context).

These people who are inequitably impacted and/or at greatest risk of harm and poor outcomes from COVID-19 have been identified and prioritised in the Testing Plan. The Plan prioritises people who have higher rates of morbidity, hospitalisation, mortality, and hardship due to COVID-19. Expedited access to testing to support early diagnosis of infection in these groups enables early intervention of treatment and support to reduce the burden of disease for individuals and their whānau.

Priority people include:

- Māori
- Pacific Peoples
- disabled people (including tāngata whaikaha Māori and Pacific disabled people)
- people with mental health and addiction issues
- older people (65 and over); and
- other inequitably impacted population groups (including migrant ethnic communities, remote and rural people, rough sleepers, people in transitional housing, and other disadvantaged groups).

Vulnerable people are at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19 and include:

- people with medical conditions (long-term health conditions and/or immunocompromised)
- older people (65 and over)
- Māori and Pacific people with co-morbidities are particularly vulnerable especially unvaccinated people); and
- people in residential care facilities, including correctional facilities.

SUPPLY OF SELF-ADMINISTERED RATs and RATs FOR THE HOUSEHOLD

Following the clinical assessment, a general practice can provide symptomatic patients or household contacts with a supply of RATs to test themselves and their household members: a box of five RATs or five individual RATs (if from a bulk pack of RATs) for each member of the household.

Information to assist patients with a self-test RAT is available on the Unite against COVID-19 website: [How to get a COVID-19 test](#). Healthline is also available to answer general questions, and provide advice on RATs.

COVID-19 ASSESSMENTS AND TESTING

The purpose of testing is to enable access to antiviral treatment for those at greatest risk, within the recommended treatment window or where a result will change clinical decision. The need to, and the choice of, test is a clinical decision based on need and the urgency of the test result. It may depend on local testing services available.

If asymptomatic, do not test - a RAT or PCR may be performed when a patient meets the following criteria:

- COVID-19-compatible symptoms, and requires an in-person clinical assessment, **AND**
- has one of the high-risk medical conditions as per the MoH list¹ (for example, history of respiratory illnesses or immunocompromised) **OR**
- meets Pharmac COVID-19 therapeutic access criteria², paying special attention to Māori and Pacific people over the age of 50.

Description	Target Group	Low transmission (no surge) ³	Medium transmission (escalating or deescalating) ⁴	High transmission (surge) ⁵	
If your patient has had COVID-19 in the last 28 days, please refer to reinfection section					
<p>A COVID-19 clinical assessment undertaken by a nurse, nurse practitioner or general practitioner for symptomatic patients and includes a COVID-19 test – either a RAT or PCR.</p> <p>Patients should be encouraged to do a self-test RAT at home, wherever possible, prior to attending general practice and upload the result to My Covid Record.</p> <p>Primary care providers should accept a self-reported RAT result when triaging patients on the self-test RAT result.</p> <p>A claim cannot be made for self-test RAT that was completed at home.</p> <p>It is voluntary for general practices to participate in providing self-test RAT kits for patients to take home.</p> <p>A GP may use clinical discretion at the time of consultation if the patient is deemed high risk, has COVID-19-compatible symptoms, and has a high pre-test probability during high transmission, (for example, known positive contact) as to whether to commence treatment without a test result/or negative RAT if they deem appropriate, and may cease treatment dependent on a subsequent negative PCR result if undertaken.</p>	<p>Priority and vulnerable people Symptomatic able to conduct a self-test RAT prior to consultation</p>	<p>If the patient has not completed a test at home:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • if feasible, consider providing a patient with RAT to self-test prior to consultation • if not feasible, follow the guidance below <p>RAT self-test at home prior to consultation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • if positive test result - treat accordingly • if negative test result and COVID-19-compatible symptoms – immediate PCR test, and consider alternative diagnosis (for example, strep throat) <p>or repeat RAT in 24 hours, depending on the time to receive a PCR test result and required action</p>	<p>RAT Self-test at home prior to consultation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • if positive test result - treat accordingly • if negative test result and COVID-19-compatible symptoms – if greater than 12 hours since the last test, consider repeat RAT in clinic; if negative, patient to repeat at home. Consider treatment while awaiting repeat test result. <p>PCR test may be used for more complex patients (for example, immunosuppressed patients where symptoms may indicate prolonged persistent infection)</p>		
	<p>Priority and vulnerable people Symptomatic unable to conduct a self-test RAT</p>	<p>RAT in clinic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • if positive test result - treat accordingly • if negative test result and COVID-19-compatible symptoms – do PCR test, and consider alternative diagnosis (for example, strep throat) <p>or repeat RAT in 24 hours, depending on the time to receive a PCR test result and required action</p>	<p>RAT in clinic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • if positive test result - treat accordingly • if negative test result and COVID-19-compatible symptoms – consider PCR test and treatment while awaiting PCR test result <p>or if high clinical concern, PCR test (depending on the time to receive a result and required action)</p> <p>PCR test may be used for more complex patients (for example, immunosuppressed patients where symptoms may indicate prolonged persistent infection)</p>		
	<p>General population Symptomatic – test result</p>		<p>RAT self-test with at home prior to consultation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • if positive test result - treat accordingly • if negative test result - consider alternative diagnosis of other respiratory pathogens (for example, strep throat) and if negative, repeat RAT 24 and 48 hours later at home, and stay home while unwell. 		
	<p>General population Symptomatic – no test result</p>		<p>No prior test: clinically assess and test if high concern - or advise patient to complete a self-test RAT at home. If negative, repeat 24 and 48 hours later, and stay home while unwell, and consider alternative diagnosis</p>	<p>No prior test: clinically assess and test if high concern - or advise patient to complete a self-administered RAT at home. If negative, repeat 24 and 48 hours later, and stay home while unwell</p>	
	<p>Asymptomatic</p>		Testing not recommended unless for public health purposes		
	Testing on arrival to New Zealand: for more information, please visit: Travelling to New Zealand ; Travel to New Zealand by Air				
	<p>Symptomatic international arrival</p>		As per public health guidance for symptomatic people. If RAT result is positive , encouraged to get a PCR test to enable WGS for variant surveillance purposes. RAT packs are available at airports with information on Rapid PCR testing should it be required.		
	<p>Asymptomatic international arrival</p>		Not recommended. If a known household contact, the individual will be following public health guidance.		

¹ Definition from MoH list of people with high risk medical condition <https://www.health.govt.nz/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-information-specific-audiences/covid-19-higher-risk-people#risk>

² **COVID-19 antivirals: Access Criteria - Pharmac | New Zealand Government**

³ Low transmission (no surge): Low grade community transmission where testing collection/distribution and laboratory testing capacity is meeting testing demand, with a low level of demand on the health system and other sectors.

⁴ Medium transmission (escalating or de-escalating): Medium transmission where case numbers (based on surveillance data, circulating variants and/or through modelling) are escalating and de-escalating between high and low transmission scenarios and there is evident demand increase in testing services and availability of resources compared to the low transmission scenario.

⁵ High transmission (surge): Wide-spread community transmission, where testing demand ranges from placing a burden on, to exceeding, testing collection/distribution and laboratory testing capacity, with a high-level burden on the health system and other sectors.

REINFECTION

At 28 days or less after the onset of a previous infection (Day 0 is the day of symptoms onset or positive test), testing for reinfection is discouraged, as it is uncommon and difficult to confirm without specialist input. People at a higher risk, or becoming more unwell, should seek advice from the healthcare provider or Healthline. People who have recently been a case within the last 28 days are not considered household contacts, and testing is not recommended.

At 29 days or more after the onset of a previous infection, individuals with new symptoms consistent with COVID-19 or household contacts are encouraged take a RAT and upload all positive or negative results to My Covid Record. Isolation requirements are the same as for the first COVID-19 infections, and household contact testing guidance applies. All people who develop COVID-19 symptoms at 29 days or more are recommended to take a RAT, and if positive, they can be treated in the same manner, whether it is a first or new infection. Healthcare providers still have discretion to do a PCR test, where a person is symptomatic but RAT negative, or inform clinical management in either case (first or new infection).

TEST RESULTS

Positive **RAT** or **PCR** test result is to be treated as a case, and managed according to clinical guidance available on Health Pathways. When a test result is entered in HealthLink, the patient will receive an automated text message with the result and details of the next steps.

RECORDING OF RAT RESULTS

General practices will need to enter data on people undertaking a **RAT** in HealthLink (select *Supervised Rapid Antigen Testing*, which will open the page where the information is to be entered).

ORDERING AND DISTRIBUTION

RATs can be ordered through the Ministry of Health's PPE portal. Any queries relating to HealthLink and IT support can be directed to the HealthLink service desk on 0800 288 887.