

## Ontario Expanding Access to Free Rapid Tests for General Public

*5 Million Free Rapid Tests Available Each Week at over 2,300 Pharmacy and Grocery Stores Across the Province*

**NEWS**

February 9, 2022

TORONTO — To further support the province's cautious easing of public health measures, the Ontario government is expanding access to free rapid testing kits to the general public for at-home use. As a result of the province's direct procurement, Ontario will be distributing 5 million rapid tests each week for eight weeks through pharmacy and grocery locations across the province, as well as 500,000 each week through community partners in vulnerable communities. In total, the province is making 44 million rapid tests available to the public for free over the coming weeks.

"As we continue to carefully ease public health measures, rapid tests are providing another layer of protection and offer the public an additional tool to confidently do the things they love, like visiting family or dining at their favourite local restaurant," said Christine Elliott, Deputy Premier and Minister of Health. "In addition to the millions of rapid tests deployed each week to support priority settings, including hospitals, long-term care homes and schools, working with our retail and community partners we are increasing access to at-home rapid tests."

Starting February 9, over 2,300 participating grocery and pharmacy locations will provide free rapid tests while supplies last, with a limit of one box of five tests per household. Participating retailers will receive additional supply from the province each week and have the ability to determine how tests are distributed in order to best serve the community, including through appointment bookings, at checkout or through online orders. A list of participating retailers as well as information on how retail locations are distributing rapid test kits can be found at [Ontario.ca/rapidtest](http://Ontario.ca/rapidtest).

To support access to tests for communities that have been impacted disproportionately by COVID-19 and face barriers to testing, including language, income and transportation, lead agencies working as part of the [High Priority Communities Strategy](#) will be distributing rapid tests through existing local partnerships, such as community centres, community health centres, places of worship, and food banks. Lead agencies will also have discretion to provide additional boxes depending on individual circumstances, such as a multi-generational home or an immunocompromised family member.

"Providing expanded access to testing for Ontarians will support the province's cautious approach to easing public health measures," said Dr. Kieran Moore, Chief Medical Officer of Health. "While testing is a critical component in our response to COVID-19, vaccination remains the best defence against the virus and its variants. Over the next few months, we need to continue following the public health measures that remain in place and vaccinate those who have yet to receive their doses to protect our communities and health care system capacity."

Providing expanded access to free rapid testing kits to the general population builds on Ontario's comprehensive testing strategy focused on the province's priority sectors and workplaces. Over 10 million rapid tests are deployed weekly to these sites and any other sector eligible for the [Provincial Antigen Screening Program](#). As of February 8, over 75 million rapid antigen tests have been deployed since November 2020, with over 33 million deployed to priority sectors to provide an

additional layer of protection for hospitals, long-term care and retirement homes. Additionally, approximately 26 million tests have been deployed to support school and licensed child care settings.

To date, Ontario has directly procured a total of about 157 million rapid tests, including 126 million between December 2021 and January 2022 alone. Ontario continues to also work closely with the federal government to address delays in shipments from Health Canada and is also directly procuring additional rapid tests where possible to ensure continued widespread access to rapid antigen tests for Ontarians. Of the 54.3 million rapid tests the federal government committed to provide Ontario in January, about 36 million have been delivered.

## QUOTES

“Everyone at Walmart Canada has had an enormous sense of pride to be part of helping turn the tide on the COVID pandemic. From our associates providing an essential service to our pharmacists administering more than 800,000 vaccines – Walmart has been there. Now, we are pleased to help ensure more people have access to free Rapid Antigen Tests. From the very beginning of this pandemic, our goal has always been to help as many customers as possible and our commitment to our customers' health and well-being is stronger than ever.”

- Shelly Kiroff, Senior Vice President, Health and Wellness, Pharmacy, Walmart Canada

“By providing free access to rapid test kits, the Ontario Government, in partnership with grocery and pharmacy retailers, is reducing the risk of COVID-19 transmission. In addition to getting a third booster shot, community testing acts as a powerful way to reduce the spread of contagion, by diagnosing early and isolating. Today’s support by grocery and pharmacy retailers in delivering test kits to communities shows us all how, working together, we can support the safe reopening of Ontario.”

- Diane J. Brisebois, President and CEO, Retail Council of Canada

“Across the province, millions of Ontarians visit our grocery and pharmacy locations each week, and our teams have stepped up in many ways to support public health measures to combat COVID-19. Today, we’re happy to continue that work, distributing free rapid tests provided by the Ontario government in nearly 700 of our locations, making testing convenient and accessible to customers in almost every community.”

- Anthony Spina, SVP Pharmacy, Loblaw Companies Limited

“Expanding access to free rapid testing kits at pharmacies is another important milestone in Ontario’s ongoing response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Ontarians across the province can now pick up a free rapid testing kit from participating neighbourhood pharmacies, to test safely and effectively at home. This initiative will reduce the spread of COVID-19 by making it convenient for the public to test and make informed decisions.”

- Sherif Guorgui, co-CEO/Chief Strategy, Stakeholder & Government Relations Officer, OnPharm-United

## QUICK FACTS

- Free rapid tests provided by the government are intended for personal use. The province can fine any businesses and individuals who may be in breach of the government's emergency order which prohibits charging unfair prices for necessary goods.
- A person who tests positive on a rapid antigen test is no longer required or encouraged to get a confirmatory PCR or rapid molecular test. If you test positive on a PCR, rapid molecular or a rapid antigen test, you must isolate. Visit [Ontario.ca/exposed](#) to learn more about isolation directions.
- As part of the Provincial Antigen Screening Program, 3.62 million rapid antigen tests are being shipped biweekly to the education and child care sectors for use when children or staff are symptomatic.
- PCR testing is available for [eligible individuals](#) at over 250 assessment centres or community labs, in addition to over 760 participating pharmacies, many of which offer pick-up/drop-off of self-collection kits. Visit [Ontario.ca/covidtestinglocations](#) to find a testing location.
- [On January 31, 2022](#), Ontario began its cautious and phased approach to easing public health measures, including increasing or maintaining capacity limits at 50 per cent in select indoor public settings as well as increasing social gathering limits to 10 people indoors and 25 people outdoors.
- Ontario has received a limited supply of Paxlovid from the federal government and is prioritizing treatment for individuals at the highest risk of severe outcomes. Visit Ontario's [webpage](#) to learn if you are eligible to receive COVID-19 antiviral treatment and where to get it.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [Ontario Outlines Steps to Cautiously and Gradually Ease Public Health Measures](#)
- [Ontario Updating Public Health Measures and Guidance in Response to Omicron](#)
- [COVID-19 Integrated Testing & Case, Contact and Outbreak Management Interim Guidance: Omicron Surge](#)
- For public inquiries, please contact the Provincial Vaccine Contact Centre at 1-833-943-3900 (TTY for people who are deaf, hearing-impaired or speech-impaired: 1-866-797-0007).
- For resources in multiple languages to help local communication efforts in responding to COVID-19, visit Ontario's [COVID-19 communication resources webpage](#).
- Visit Ontario's [website](#) to learn more about how the province continues to protect the people of Ontario from COVID-19.
- Business who have questions about public health and workplace safety measures can call the Stop the Spread Business Information Line at 1-888-444-3659.
- For public inquiries call ServiceOntario, INFOline at 1-866-532-3161 (Toll-free in Ontario only)

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