

BC's Rapid Point of Care Testing Strategy

March 4, 2021



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What is Point of Care (POC) Testing?

Polymerase chain reaction (PCR) is the gold standard diagnostic test for COVID-19 due to its high sensitivity, particularly for a person with new symptoms.

The sample is collected and then transported to laboratory.

Results are typically available within 24 to 72 hours of sample collection.

PCR testing was widely available in BC since the beginning of the pandemic, and has contributed significantly to COVID-19 control.

As of March 3, 2021, 1,955,945 PCR tests were performed in BC.

COVID-19 **POC tests** are more portable and the testing can be done at an individual's location (at the "point of care") as opposed to being transported to a laboratory.

COVID-19 POC tests available in BC include **rapid antigen tests (RAT)** and **rapid nucleic acid amplification tests (RNAT)**.

Background

In October 2020, the **Government of Canada began to approve COVID-19 POC tests** and initiated procurement of the approved tests for Canadian provinces and territories. Late October and through December samples started to arrive in BC for validation, and BC moved quickly to validate and pilot the use of rapid tests in several settings:

- Long-term care facilities
- Rural and remote testing
- Provincial correctional facilities
- Managing outbreaks
- Discretionary use by Medical Health Officers

Health Canada recommends three potential uses for POC testing:

- Testing symptomatic individuals
- Repeat serial testing of asymptomatic individuals in addition to other infection prevention/control measures
- Deployment to provide testing to specific populations

As of February 20, 2021, a total of 303,617 tests kits have been distributed to health authorities.

Benefits and Limitations

General Benefits:

- **Accessibility:** tests are more mobile and able to be deployed closer to people who need testing.
- **Fast:** quicker results to enable a public health response (typical turn around is 15-20 minutes).
- **Affordable and Available:** relatively low cost and currently high availability in terms of supply.

General Disadvantages:

- **Accuracy:** higher chance of missing individuals who have COVID-19.
- **Staff and Time:** requires a regulated health care worker to administer, and administering tests for a higher number of people is slow and still requires compliance with implementation standards.
- **False sense of security:** compliance with public health measures could be decreased due to a false sense of security based on results from a test with a lower sensitivity.

Go-Forward Plans

Implementation of POC will be coordinated by a **Rapid POC Testing Team** through the Provincial Health Services Authority and in partnership with the Ministry of Health.

POC testing to be used in the following sectors:

- Communities settings
- Where rapid COVID-19 test results are needed to guide immediate public health action
- For screening in settings with increased risk of transmission and/or outbreaks

Go-Forward Plans: Community Settings

POC testing can be used in communities and settings where there are barriers to timely receipt of results of diagnostic PCR testing (i.e. symptomatic persons):

- Rural, remote and Indigenous communities
- Marginalized and under-housed or homeless populations
- Remote worksites

Go-Forward Plans: Outbreak Management

POC testing can be used where rapid COVID-19 test results are needed to guide immediate public health action:

- Outbreak management in any settings under guidance of medical health officers in settings such as schools, hospital, First Nations communities.
- Hospital settings under guidance of medical health officers and facility or program health administrators.

Go-Forward Plans: Settings With Increased Risk of Transmission and/or Outbreaks

- Long-term care, Assisted and Independent Living
- Correctional Facilities
- Other congregate living facilities (i.e. shelters, student residences, in-patient or residential care)
- Industries where outbreaks are more likely (i.e. food processing plants, on-site congregate living or camps)

Go-Forward Plans: Any Site Choosing to Use POC

Province-wide implementation of POC will be coordinated by a Rapid POC Testing Team set up by the Provincial Health Services Authority working in partnership with the Ministry of Health. This team will provide advice and guidance, and assist in accessing Point of Care tests. Any site choosing to use POC:

- Must meet provincial implementation standards and federal reporting requirements.
- Must report all positive COVID-19 tests to public health and health authorities who will follow-up.
- Must ensure POC testing is a complement to, and does not replace or allow for relaxing of, existing public health measures in each setting.

As BC's immunization program proceeds, the use of POC testing is likely to change.

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