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June 18, 2021

To: All employers in the area served by the Timiskaming Health Unit

Re: Letter of Instruction from the Medical Officer of Health on Workplace Rapid Antigen Testing

The province of Ontario has offered businesses the opportunity to add rapid antigen screening tests on top of their existing COVID-19 prevention measures. Rapid testing is an additional screening method that can help stop the spread of COVID-19 by identifying cases that may otherwise have been missed. Organizations can test on-site 1-3 times per week and get results in about 15 minutes. It is important to note that these tests will not detect all cases of COVID-19 and are not a replacement for other safety measures.

Organizations that are interested in rapid antigen testing can check if they are eligible for free kits at Ontario.ca/testingonsite. They may also be able to obtain test kits from their local Chamber of Commerce.

The province has removed the requirement for employers to report positive rapid antigen tests to local public health units. This was done largely to support health units that no longer have the capacity to respond to such reports. This is not the case in Timiskaming, where we have the capacity to rapidly respond to these reports. If one of your staff tests positive, you are still required to report the result to us, as per the Instructions below.

Instructions:

As Medical Officer of Health, I am issuing this Letter of Instruction to all owners and operators of workplaces engaged in rapid antigen screening for COVID-19 in the areas served by the Timiskaming Health Unit. The instructions are provided pursuant to Schedule 1, section 2(2) of Ontario Regulation 82/20: Rules for Areas in Stage 1, O. Reg. 263/20: RULES FOR AREAS IN STAGE 2, and O. Reg. 364/20: RULES FOR AREAS IN STAGE 3 made under the *Reopening Ontario (A Flexible Response to COVID-19) Act, 2020, S.O. 2020, c.17*:

- ❖ Report all positive rapid antigen tests for COVID-19 conducted in the areas served by the Timiskaming Health Unit to the Timiskaming Health Unit within 3 hours after the test is conducted.

Positive test results can be reported by calling any of our offices or 1-888-747-4305 during business hours. Tests can be reported after-hours by calling our on-call system at 1-705-647-3033.

Sincerely,

Dr. Glenn Corneil, B.Sc., M.D., C.C.F.P., F.C.F.P.
Acting Medical Officer of Health/CEO

Frequently Asked Questions:

What happens if one of my employees tests positive?

It is urgent that they be re-tested using a PCR test within 24 hours. Your employee should be sent home, instructed to self-isolate, and should wait to be contacted by the Timiskaming Health Unit. Depending on your workplace protections, other employees who work closely with the positive worker may also have to self-isolate while the PCR test results are pending. The Timiskaming Health Unit will work with partners to expedite the follow-up testing and to obtain results in less than 24 hours whenever possible.

How often should my employees be tested?

If you received sector-specific guidance, you should follow that guidance. Since rapid antigen testing will not detect all cases of COVID-19, we recommend testing employees twice per week. When high levels of community transmission are occurring, consider increasing the testing frequency to 2-3 times per week.

Does a positive rapid antigen test mean that an outbreak is occurring in my workplace?

Not necessarily. A workplace outbreak of COVID-19 is defined as **two** lab confirmed cases with an epidemiological link in the workplace (same work area, same shift) within **a 14-day period** where both cases could have **reasonably acquired their infection in the workplace**. Timiskaming Health Unit staff follow up with all cases and attempt to determine where they acquired their infection.

How long will my employees be required to self-isolate?

Employees who have COVID-19 will be required to self-isolate for a minimum of 10 days from when they become ill or test positive. They are no longer considered infectious at that time. Timiskaming Health Unit staff are in regular communication with all cases regarding their potential return date.

Employees who are deemed high-risk contacts will be required to self-isolate for 14 days from their last exposure to a confirmed case of COVID-19. If they have not become ill by this point, they are no longer considered to be at risk of developing COVID-19 from this exposure.

Can I use rapid antigen tests on employees who fail their daily screening?

No. Rapid antigen screening must only be used on asymptomatic individuals (showing no symptoms of COVID-19). Employees who fail their daily screen must be instructed to seek testing at a local assessment centre.