March 16, 2021

COVID-19 Point-of-Care/Rapid Test Information

Since the announcement recently about the new ND access to Rapid COVID Tests, there have been many questions and much speculation about what this means. There have also been lots of documents referenced as sources of information for you, but with this summary the OAND has tried to make the information a little easier to digest. What follows are some key points that we think are important for Ontario NDs to consider. This information is available from a variety of different Ministry of Health and other Ontario Government sites. For those who have read everything that the recent CONO email on this topic linked to, this will likely be a review. For those who haven't, you should consider this an introduction, and if you are interested in participating in this testing, we recommend you still read the original documents for a more comprehensive understanding. This is a summary of what we know right now and we will likely have to add to it in the near future.

What are Point-of-Care or Rapid COVID-19 Tests?

- The COVID-19 "Point of Care Test" (POCT), also referred to as the "Rapid Test" is essentially used for screening for COVID-19 (in settings like high-risk workplaces).

- It can be performed anywhere (i.e., on-site, at the place of employment) by a health professional and does not require shipping a specimen to a lab for processing. It takes approximately 15 minutes to yield a result.

- These tests are being undertaken to increase the chances of early identification of cases in otherwise asymptomatic individuals.

- It is not a lab-based test and the lab companies don't supply these. These tests use a medical device (testing kit) approved by Health Canada. They are supplied by the Provincial Government and are being used at "essential" large employers, long-term care sites, etc. There is no current evidence of their use by community-based health care providers (like NDs) in their clinics.

- In a February press release, the Government of Ontario said that they would be deploying about a million rapid tests per week to essential workplaces (e.g., food processing companies, water & power companies, manufacturing, warehousing, supply chain, mining, construction, etc.), LTC & retirement homes and other congregate living

settings, schools as well as some hospitals and assessment centres. They have stated that they are working with essential industries and reaching out to key companies and inviting them to participate in the rapid testing program. So, these are currently company or institution-run testing programs with practitioners doing the tests, rather than being practitioner-driven programs.

- We are investigating whether these test kits are available to practitioners in community practice, because it seems that they are only designated for large employers, institutions and isolated/vulnerable communities.

- If you can get them, all indications are that these test kits are fully paid for by the government, so we recommend cautious consideration before you try to source POCT kits on your own for a price.

- All indication is that these tests are performed on workers/employees at no charge, with testing practitioners employed by the company/ institution. *We are not yet sure how or if in-clinic cost-recovery could work in a ND's practice.*

What You Need To Know If You are Administering This Test?

- Training is minimal and can be done by another practitioner who performs these tests, combined with following the manufacturer's instructions.

- Like any interaction there would have to be consent.
  We are still working to understand how the ND-patient relationship would be considered in a walk-in testing environment if a ND was employed to give these tests.

- All positive results from these tests must be reported to the local public health agency, and if your patient tests positive, the mandatory referral for the treatment of COVID-19 is still in place.

- Results of these tests are considered "preliminary", with a regular COVID-19 diagnostic test (e.g., PCR Test) then required, through the existing channels, for confirmation of positive results.
  Note: The tests currently available in the settings that a ND could encounter are Point-of-Care Antigen (POC Antigen Assays) and provide "preliminary" results, but in isolated (e.g., northern) settings there may also be Point-of-Care Molecular (POC NAAT Assays), the results of which may be considered "final".

- The two antigen POCTs are the Panbio and BD Veritor tests. Antigen testing detects specific proteins from the virus to screen and identify people who need further testing.

- A positive result on an antigen POCT is considered a preliminary positive.

Individuals who receive a positive result through antigen POCT must:

- Seek an immediate laboratory PCR test (i.e. within 24 hours) to act as a confirmatory test as per Provincial Testing Guidance.
- Immediately self-isolate until the result of the confirmatory lab-based PCR test is known.

- Antigen POCT does not replace public health measures such as symptom screening, physical distancing, masking and hand hygiene. Nor does it replace requirements to protect the health and safety of workers.

- The antigen POCT is intended for asymptomatic individuals. Any individual who is currently symptomatic or has been in a contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19 should be directed to obtain diagnostic PCR testing instead of antigen POCT.

- Specimen collection for POCT antigen tests may also be done by the person being tested ('self-swabbing'). Self-swabbing for POCT antigen tests is not currently approved by Health Canada, but the Ministry of Health is of the opinion that it is appropriate, from a clinical perspective, to do self-collection for antigen POCTs under the following specific circumstances:

    - If a trained individual, including a health care professional (regulated or unregulated) is supervising the self-swabbing.
    - Any individual supervising self-swabbing must consult the self-swabbing training resource developed by Ontario Health in collaboration with Public Health Ontario and ensure they have the appropriate knowledge, skills, and judgment to provide appropriate self-swabbing oversight, including how to operate the device, PPE requirements, and how to safely dispose of waste.

- Health professionals are responsible for satisfying all applicable legislative and regulatory requirements, including those under the Health Protection and Promotion Act (HPPA), Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA), Health Care Consent Act (HCCA), and Regulated Health Professions Act (RHPA).

As stated, this is a preliminary summary of information that the OAND has gathered about Point-of-Care/Rapid Testing for COVID-19. We are hopeful that this will answer some of the questions that members have sent to us about these tests. No doubt, more questions will arise. We will endeavour to answer those as more information becomes available.