

Qs and As for Pre-Departure Antigen Test

Introduction

Antigen tests have a lower sensitivity than molecular tests for detecting COVID-19 over the duration of infection, and are less likely to detect asymptomatic infections.

However, evidence indicates that antigen tests can detect cases with high viral load. In contrast to the 72-hour MOLECULAR test requirement, antigen tests must be professionally performed/observed no more than 1 day of travel, taking into account that because these tests have lower sensitivity, they should be performed as close as possible to travel. This, coupled with broad international availability of antigen tests, and high domestic vaccination rates, support adoption of professionally performed/observed antigen tests for the purposes of pre-arrival testing of travellers seeking to enter Canada. Accepting antigen tests under some circumstances brings Canada's border and travel measures into closer alignment with those of countries, including the US which accept evidence from a professionally performed/observed antigen test to meet pre-entry testing requirements. Additionally, recognizing professionally performed/observed negative antigen test results for Canada's pre-entry test requirement reduces the barriers to travel, given the higher cost and difficulty of acquiring molecular tests in some jurisdictions.

Easing of Travel Restrictions

On February 28, 2022, the Government of Canada adjusted its Travel Health Notice from a Level 3 to a Level 2, meaning that the Government is no longer recommending that Canadians avoid travel for non-essential purposes. At the same time, the Government of Canada is now accepting professionally observed negative antigen test results to satisfy pre-board/pre-entry testing requirements. This reduces the rate at which fully vaccinated travellers selected for mandatory randomized testing upon arrival in Canada. In addition, fully vaccinated asymptomatic travellers selected for arrival testing are no longer required to quarantine until receipt of a negative test result.

Accepting antigen tests under some circumstances brings Canada's border and travel measures into closer alignment with those of countries, including the US, which accept evidence from a professionally performed/observed antigen tests to meet pre-entry testing requirements. Closer alignment of pre-departure/pre-arrival testing requirements with the United States will ease some of the burden associated with cross-border travel between Canada and the United States by providing a more uniform testing standard for air travel between both countries. Accepting professionally observed negative antigen test results for Canada's pre-entry test requirement reduces the barriers to travel, given the higher cost and difficulty of acquiring molecular tests in some jurisdictions.

While professionally observed antigen tests are permitted for use as a pre-arrival test, more accurate molecular (such as PCR and RT-LAMP) test results continue to be required as valid proof of a previous positive COVID-19 infection. Since travellers with

proof of a prior COVID-19 infection with a molecular test are exempt from post-border testing requirements, including mandatory randomized testing, it is vital that the test used as evidence of prior infection is as accurate as possible.

Please see Annex B for more information on testing.

Annex A: Questions and Answers

Q1: What is the change to Canada's border measures with respect to Antigen Tests?

A1: Effective February 28, 2022, travellers required to provide a negative COVID-19 pre-entry test result have the option of using a professionally observed antigen test (taken no more than one day before their scheduled flight or arrival at the land border or marine port of entry) *or* a professionally observed molecular test result (taken no more than 72 hours before their scheduled flight or arrival at the land border or marine port of entry).

Covid-19 antigen test means a COVID-19 screening or diagnostic immunoassay that:

- a) Detects the presence of a viral antigen indicating the presence of COVID-19;
- b) Is authorized for sale in Canada or in another jurisdiction;
- c) If the test is self-administered, it is observed and the result is verified
 - I. In person by an accredited laboratory or testing provider, or
 - II. in real time by remote audio-visual means by the accredited laboratory or testing provider who provided the test; or
- d) If the test is not self-administered, an accredited laboratory or testing provider performs it.

Q2: What is a valid antigen test for the purpose of Canada's pre-arrival testing requirements?

A2: To be valid for the purpose of travel, the COVID-19 antigen test must be authorized for sale or distribution in Canada or in the jurisdiction in which it was obtained. It must be performed by a laboratory or testing provider, or, if self-administered, must be observed in person by a laboratory or testing care provider, or via audio-visual means with the laboratory or testing provider that provided the test.

Q3: What qualifies as a testing provider?

A3: Testing provider means:

- (a) a person who may provide COVID-19 screening or diagnostic testing services under the laws of the jurisdiction where the service is provided; or
- (b) an organization, such as a telehealth service provider or pharmacy, which may provide COVID-19 screening or diagnostic testing services under the laws of the

jurisdiction where the service is provided and that employs or contracts with a person referred to in paragraph (a).

Q4: Would an Antigen Test replace the molecular test (e.g. PCR)?

A4: No. Travellers have the option to take either a molecular test taken no more than 72 hours before their scheduled flight or arrival at the land border or marine port of entry or an antigen test taken no more than one day before their scheduled flight or arrival at the land border or marine port of entry.

Q5: Would a person be permitted to travel if they receive a negative molecular (e.g. PCR) test result following a positive professionally observed antigen test result?

A5: Travellers may present a negative professionally observed antigen test result collected no more than one day before, or a negative molecular test result collected no more than 72 hours before, their scheduled flight or arrival at the land border or marine port of entry. If a person receives a negative molecular test result following a positive antigen test result, they will be permitted to travel, so long as the test meets all of the requirements.

However, every person who enters Canada and for whom we have reasonable grounds to suspect they have COVID-19, exhibits signs and symptoms of COVID-19, knows that they have COVID-19 or has received a positive result *for any type of COVID-19 test* that was performed on a specimen collected within a period of 10 days before the day on which they enter Canada or on the day on which they enter Canada, must isolate themselves without delay in accordance with the instructions provided by a screening officer or quarantine officer. They must isolate in a suitable place and remain in isolation for 10 days (begins on the day on which the person enters Canada).

Q6: What advice will be given to travellers who present a positive pre-arrival antigen test at the land border?

A6: Foreign national travellers are not permitted entry with a positive pre-arrival COVID-19 test. Travellers with right of entry will be subject to the isolation requirements under the Order in Council (OIC), and must follow the instructions of a Quarantine Officer upon arrival. They may also be subject to a fine for not providing a negative pre-arrival test as required.

Q7: Will there be guidance to support officials in determining the validity of antigen test results?

A7: Travellers are required to provide evidence of a COVID-19 antigen test prior to boarding a flight to Canada, or upon entry via land or marine ports of entry.

Q8: What information must be included on the test results?

A8: Evidence of a COVID-19 antigen test means written evidence of a COVID-19 antigen test that contains the following information:

- a) traveller name and date of birth
- b) name and civic address of the laboratory or testing provider that performed, or observed the test and verified the test result
- c) the date on which the specimen was collected
- d) the test method used
- e) the test result

Q9: Can a positive result from an antigen test be used as proof of prior infection?

A9: No, a positive antigen test result cannot be used as proof of prior COVID-19 infection. This is because molecular tests are documented to be a higher quality test and can be verified because they were processed in a laboratory. It is difficult to verify that an antigen test was performed appropriately and due to issues of sensitivity (related to performance on asymptomatic individuals), we cannot accept them.

As travellers with valid proof of a prior positive COVID-19 infection are released from post-border testing requirements, it is vital that the test used as evidence is as accurate as possible. Due to the possibility of a false positive result from a rapid antigen test, a positive molecular test result will continue to be required as proof of a previous COVID-19 infection.

Q10: If a traveller tests positive on their antigen test, what are their options to eventually board a flight to Canada?

A10: Travellers who test positive on their antigen test have two options:

First, they can immediately seek a molecular test. If this test result is also **positive**, the traveller must isolate according to the requirements of the country in which they are located. After 10 days, they can use this positive molecular test result as proof of prior infection to board a flight to Canada. If the molecular test result is **negative**, the traveller can make arrangements to board a flight to Canada no more than 72 hours after the molecular test was administered.

Second, a traveller can arrange for additional professionally performed/observed antigen tests. If they obtain a negative test result on a subsequent antigen test, they can then board a flight to Canada. It is possible that those with a positive antigen test will continue to test positive so travellers will need to decide when to seek additional antigen tests.

However, upon entry to Canada every traveller who enters Canada and who has received a positive result *for any type of COVID-19 test* that was performed on a specimen collected within a period of 10 days before the day on which they enter Canada or on the day on which they enter Canada must isolate themselves without delay in accordance with the instructions provided by a screening officer or quarantine

officer. They must isolate in a suitable place and remain in isolation for 10 days (begins on the day on which the person enters Canada).

Q11: Since Feb. 28, 2022, do travellers who test positive while abroad still have to wait another 10 days before returning home to Canada?

A11: An individual with a positive pre-departure professionally observed antigen test (taken no more than one day before their initially scheduled flight departure) is considered infectious. They are not eligible for boarding until such a time as they can produce a negative test result (either a negative antigen test or molecular test, or positive molecular test taken 10-180 days ago). Anyone who tests positive should immediately isolate and follow all relevant public health guidance in that jurisdiction.

Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) is working with Transport Canada to finalize guidance for airlines and the travelling public on the forthcoming changes to the border measures.

Q12: If a traveller tests positive on a molecular test, and subsequently takes an antigen test that is negative, can they board a flight to Canada?

A12: Yes, a traveller is required to show proof of a negative test result in order to board a flight to Canada. However, upon entry to Canada the traveller will be required to isolate for 10 days if they received a positive test result *for any* type of COVID-19 test performed on a specimen collected within a period of 10 days before the day on which they enter Canada.

Q13: Can antigen tests be taken at home?

A13: Taking an unsupervised rapid antigen test at home is not sufficient to meet the pre-entry requirement. COVID-19 antigen tests may be self-administered *only* if it is observed and the result is verified, either in person by an accredited laboratory or testing provider, or in real time via an audio-visual connection by the accredited laboratory or testing provider who provided the test.

Other jurisdictions, such as the United States, follow a similar approach. Sample collection must be observed/supervised. Self-administration of antigen tests via telehealth is accepted, so long as the antigen test is an authorized product in the country of purchase.

Q14: When does a pre-board/arrival antigen test need to be taken?

A14: If travelling by air, antigen tests need to be taken no more than one day before the aircraft's initial scheduled departure time, or within another period set out under the *Aeronautics Act*.

By land or marine entry, the antigen test must be taken no more than one day prior to arrival at the port of entry in Canada.

Q15: Why 1-day rather than 24 hours?

A15: A 1-day time frame is used instead of 24 hours to provide more flexibility to travellers. By using a 1-day window, test acceptability does not depend on the time of the flight or the time of day that the test sample was taken.

For example, if a flight is at noon on a Wednesday, a traveller would be permitted to board the flight if the test was administered at any time the previous day.

Q16: How will testing requirements be handled for short trips?

A16: Testing requirements are the same regardless of trip duration.

Q17: If I take a short trip to the United States, can I undergo a pre-arrival test in Canada for the purpose of re-entry?

A17: No. You must undergo a COVID-19 test in the United States prior to returning to Canada.

Q18: What happens if a flight is delayed past the 1-day limit for testing?

A18: A negative COVID-19 test result is valid if administered within the requisite period prior to the flight's initial scheduled departure time. If the flight is delayed, pre-board test results will be accepted for up to an additional 24 hours.

Q19: If a traveller is transiting through Canada to another country, do they still need to get tested to meet Canadian requirements?

A19: No. If travelling by air, a person who plans to arrive at a Canadian airport on board an aircraft in order to transit to another country and to remain in a *sterile transit area*, as defined in section 2 of the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations*, until they leave Canada, is exempt from the requirement to provide a pre-board negative COVID-19 test result. However, it is incumbent on travellers to meet the testing requirements of other transit countries and their country of final destination.

Various exemptions for connecting and transiting exist for residents of remote communities, such as:

For land and marine travellers: Pre-arrival tests are not required of habitual residents of the remote communities of Hyder, Alaska, Northwest Angle, Minnesota or Point Roberts, Washington, who seek to enter Canada to carry out everyday functions within neighbouring communities of their community, if the person intends to remain in those communities while in Canada and does not intend to transit from Canada to a community in the United States other than their community or to another country.

They are also not required for habitual residents of a place in Alaska who enter Canada via Yukon or northern Ports of Entry in British Columbia to access another place in Alaska or to return to their place of residence if neither they nor any other person in the conveyance leave the conveyance while in Canada.

Q20: Can a valid negative antigen test result be used for land/marine crossings or just for air travel?

A20: Yes. A professionally observed negative antigen test result can be used for all modes of travel.

Q21: Can antigen tests be used for children?

A21: Yes. Unless otherwise exempted, all travellers 5 years of age or older must provide proof of an accepted COVID-19 test result:

- A negative COVID-19 test result collected within the applicable timeframe.
- Proof of a positive COVID-19 infection, confirmed via molecular test, within at least 10 calendar days and no more than 180 calendar days before flights initial departure time or before entering Canada via land or marine port of entry.

Q22: Can a traveller be exempted from pre-arrival testing requirements?

A22: Yes. There are a limited number of cohorts exempt from the requirement to present a negative pre-arrival COVID-19 test result, such as persons delivering essential goods and services, certain trans-border communities, and others. Please consult the travel.gc.ca at [COVID-19 Travel: Checklists for requirements and exemptions - Travel restrictions in Canada – Travel.gc.ca](https://travel.gc.ca/travel-alerts/notices/20210924-001)

Resources:

- Explanatory Note published to support the Jan 31, 2022 QIO OIC 74
- [Interim Guidance on RAT](#)
- [Minimizing the Risk of Exposure to COVID-19 in Canada Order \(Quarantine, Isolation and Other Obligations\)](#)
- [National Guidance on use of RAT](#)
- [\(Centres for Disease Control and Prevention USA\) Requirement for Proof of Negative COVID-19 Test or Documentation of Recovery from COVID-19](#)

Annex B - Excerpt from Explanatory Note published to support the Jan 31, 2022 QIO

Testing

Testing capabilities advanced significantly in early 2021. Over 197 countries and territories require a negative pre-travel COVID-19 test or medical certificate as a condition of entry into their jurisdictions. The United States (US), for instance, currently requires that all travellers arriving by air to the US have evidence of a negative pre-departure molecular or antigen test no more than one day prior to boarding a flight to

the US, irrespective of vaccination status. The US does not currently require testing for entry at the land border.

Antigen tests have a lower sensitivity than molecular tests for detecting COVID-19 over the duration of infection, and are less likely to detect asymptomatic infections. However, evidence indicates that rapid antigen tests (RATs) can detect most cases with high viral load, who are the most likely to be infectious. This, coupled with broad international availability of RATs, high domestic vaccination rates, and the improving epidemiological situation in Canada supports adoption of RATs for the purposes of pre-arrival testing of travellers seeking to enter Canada. Accepting RATs under some circumstances brings Canada's border and travel measures into closer alignment with those of many other countries, including the US and many G7 allies, which either do not have pre-entry testing requirements in effect or accept evidence from RATs to meet pre-entry testing requirements. Additionally, recognizing negative RAT results for Canada's pre-entry test requirement reduces the barriers to travel, given the higher cost and difficulty of acquiring molecular tests in some jurisdictions.

Available science demonstrates that, as is the case with many other viruses, a person may continue to obtain a positive molecular test result up to 180 days after their infection, even though they are no longer considered infectious. Positive molecular test results of previously infected individuals, for tests performed up to 180 days prior, should not be considered as evidence of a new infection posing risk, but rather that a person has recovered from a prior COVID-19 infection. Since a positive test result may inadvertently prevent a recovered patient from entering Canada, acceptable proof of prior infection from an asymptomatic traveller is accepted as an alternative to a negative pre-arrival test, and as an alternative to the requirement to test upon arrival. Requiring that prior positive test results be obtained at least 10 days before the initial scheduled departure (by air) or arrival time (by land) allows for the time needed to become non-infectious, thus preventing those persons who may be infectious from travelling and possibly transmitting COVID-19 upon travel to Canada. Due to the possibility of a false positive result from a rapid antigen test, a positive molecular test result will continue to be required as proof of a previous COVID-19 infection.