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|  Tasmanian Government | THIS IS AN ALERT FROM THE DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH | | |
| | Please distribute as soon as possible to all doctors and nurses in this practice. | | |
| Public Health Emergency Operations Centre | | | |
| 14 January 2022 | No. of pages (including this page): 2 | Phone: 1800 671 738 | Fax: 6173 0821 |

COVID-19 Update No. 109

This alert updates the 13 January 2022 COVID-19 Update.

TASMANIAN UPDATE

Rapid antigen testing is now the primary tool to diagnose cases of COVID-19 in the community. When patients need to get tested, a Rapid Antigen Test (RAT) kit is the first option to test for COVID-19, unless they require a PCR test due to the reasons listed below.

Public Health advise the following groups of people should have a **PCR test**:

Those potentially eligible for COVID specific therapies regardless of immunisation status

- **People with immunodeficiency**
 - Haematologic neoplasms: leukaemias, lymphoma, myelodysplastic syndrome
 - Transplant recipients
 - Immunocompromised (primary or acquired)
- **People receiving immunosuppressive therapy**
 - Chemo or radiotherapy
 - High dose corticosteroids (more than 20mg per day for 14 days or longer)
 - Immunomodulating biologics and most disease-modifying anti-rheumatic drugs (DMARDs)
- **People who receive dialysis**
- **People who have end stage renal failure**
- **People who are not fully vaccinated and have the following risks**
 - Age > 50
 - Obesity (BMI > 30 kg/m²)
 - Diabetes (including gestational)
 - Chronic kidney disease
 - Cardiovascular disease (including congestive heart failure and hypertension)
 - Chronic lung disease (including chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and asthma)
 - Chronic liver disease

People are free to purchase RATs from pharmacies and supermarkets and we expect they will become easier to buy this way in the coming weeks.

Patients need to get tested when:

- they have cold and flu-like symptoms
- they have been identified as a close contact of someone who is a confirmed case
- they are directed to by Public Health

The Department of Health are providing free RAT kits to people in these categories.

From 12noon Friday 14 January, to get a free RAT kit, people can apply using an online form. They will need to provide a mobile phone number and email address. This is the easiest and fastest way to arrange a free RAT kit.

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- By using a registration system, we can ensure RATs are getting to people who are required to be tested across Tasmania, providing faster, safer and more convenient access to testing for COVID-19.
- Once a person applies for a RAT, if they are eligible for a free test, they will receive an SMS (text message) authorising them to collect a RAT. They will need to show staff the SMS when they arrive at their preferred collection site.
- If a person is unable to collect the RAT from a distribution site or arrange someone else to collect on their behalf, they need to call the Public Health Hotline.
- **PCR testing continues to be available for anyone who is required to be tested and cannot access a RAT, or are not able to use a RAT.**
- **Reporting a positive RAT result is required to confirm a case, and to receive support from the Department of Health and financial assistance if eligible.**
- If a person has had a PCR test and a RAT result, the PCR positive result will be recorded by the Department of Health. **Do not report the positive RAT result.** If a person has already provided the positive RAT result they need to call the Public Health Hotline and let them know.
- **The Australian Government are also providing Rapid Antigen Test kits to people who have a concession card, including a health care card, via pharmacies when stock is available.**
www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/health-care-card

WHAT TO DO

- Ensure your COVIDSafety Plan is up to date and all staff are aware of the actions they need to take. For more information go to [COVID-19 Case and Outbreak Management | Coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\)](#)
 - Ensure your clinic is set up to reduce risk of transmission events occurring through the use of social distancing, personal protective equipment, hand hygiene and other measures.
 - Continue to screen patients entering your practice for symptoms of COVID-19 or close contact with a case of COVID-19.
 - **Continue to support all staff and patients to get tested for COVID-19 if they have any cold or flu-like symptoms or loss of smell or taste with a PCR or RAT.**
 - **Make sure that all patients who test positive on a RAT are advised to isolate, notify their close contacts and register their test result on the coronavirus website.**
 - Keep up to date on testing clinic locations and opening hours, including mobile testing clinics, at [Testing for COVID-19 | Coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\)](#)
 - Encourage all eligible patients to get vaccinated against COVID-19. Booster shots are now available four months after completing the primary course. Bookings are required and can be made via [Vaccination information | Coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\)](#)
 - If you have any questions about this alert, please contact the Public Health Emergency Operations Centre at covid.response@health.tas.gov.au or call the [Public Health Hotline](#)
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Thank you for your ongoing support.

Dr Julie Graham
Deputy Director of Public Health – Public Health Emergency Operation Centre