

TO: Vermont Health Care Providers and Health Care Facilities
FROM: Patsy Kelso, PhD, State Epidemiologist

COVID-19 Testing Recommendation Update for Long-term Care Facilities

As of March 16, 2021, 60% of staff and 84% of residents in long-term care facilities statewide are fully vaccinated against the virus that causes COVID-19. An additional 14% of staff and 11% of residents have received one dose of the two-dose vaccine. Vermont has experienced a decline in cases and outbreaks in long-term care facilities since January. As a result, the Health Department recommends the following updated surveillance testing approaches to identify cases as early as possible and mitigate the impact of COVID-19 in these settings. These recommendations are effective March 22, 2021.

Testing in response to cases or outbreaks in long-term care facilities will continue to be performed at the Health Department Laboratory as well as at the Broad Institute.

Surveillance Testing Strategies:

Assisted Living Residences, Residential Care Homes, and Therapeutic Community Residences

1. Implement once weekly testing of all staff using a PCR test. Twice weekly PCR testing of all staff is no longer required.
2. Use antigen tests immediately upon identification of a symptomatic resident or staff person.

Skilled Nursing Facilities

1. Daily antigen testing of all staff on the days they work before the start of their shifts is no longer required.
2. Continue once weekly PCR testing of all staff unless more frequent testing is required by CMS.
3. Use antigen tests immediately upon identification of a symptomatic patient or staff person.

Surveillance Testing Resources:

Accessing PCR Tests

The Vermont Agency of Human Services has established a contract with CIC Health to assist long-term care facilities in accessing reliable PCR testing through the Broad Institute. Facilities can be connected with CIC by contacting Ashley Gilman at DAIL (ashley.gilman@vermont.gov).

Accessing Antigen Tests

Some long-term care facilities have received antigen testing equipment and/or supplies directly from the federal government. These supplies may be used. Facilities that have not received a federal allocation, or that need additional antigen testing capacity, may receive Abbott BinaxNOW™ COVID-19 antigen tests from the Health Department. Ordering information is below, along with additional information about the Abbott BinaxNOW™ COVID-19 antigen test. Questions may be sent to ahs.binaxnowtesting@vermont.gov.

Antigen Test Reporting Requirements

All test results (positive, negative, and inconclusive) shall be reported to the Health Department within 24 hours.* There are multiple options for electronic reporting:

- HL7 2.5.1 message
- Automated spreadsheet using the National Flat File schema
- State of Vermont COVID-19 Test Result Reporting Form
- National Healthcare Safety Network (NHSN) Point-of-Care Test Reporting Tool (preferred for CMS-certified long-term care facilities, and satisfies reporting to the Health Department)

For information on reporting options and to register for the Vermont COVID-19 Test Result Reporting Form please visit the [Health Department's Lab Result Reporting web page](#).

*Until electronic reporting is set up, only positive results shall be faxed to the Health Department at 802-951-4061. The faxed report should include patient demographic information (name, DOB, contact information), test type and result, and reporting facility information (name and contact information). No reporting of negative or inconclusive results is needed until electronic reporting is set up.

Antigen Test Interpretation

Evaluating the result of an antigen test should incorporate several factors: the performance characteristics of the test (e.g., sensitivity, specificity), the prevalence of COVID-19 in the community, and the clinical and epidemiological characteristics of the person being tested. See the existing [CDC guidelines](#) and [Vermont resources](#) for further information on interpreting results and determining when confirmatory PCR testing is needed.

About the Abbott BinaxNOW™ Antigen Test

The Abbott BinaxNOW™ COVID-19 antigen test has [emergency use authorization](#) from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. This test is a lateral flow immunoassay and is a qualitative test. Results are visually read at 15 minutes. The test kit must be stored at temperature between 2 and 30 °C. All components should be discarded as biohazard waste. Please refer to Abbott [BinaxNOW COVID 19 Ag Card Product Expiry Update](#) for updated guidance on lot numbers that

qualify for extended shelf life. Please refer to [CDC guidelines](#) with regard to personal protective equipment for specimen collection and handling.

Abbott BinaxNOW™ Training

Participation in an online training with an Abbott trainer is required before using these tests. In addition, [online training videos](#) on how to administer the test must be completed in advance of the training, and are available as a reference in the future. To access additional support, the Abbott Rapid Diagnostics Technical Services Team can be reached at ts.scr@abbott.com or 1-800-257-9525 between 8 am. and 8 p.m. EST Monday through Friday.

Abbott BinaxNOW™ CLIA Requirements and Where Testing Can Be Performed

This test is for use at the point of care (POC), i.e., in patient care settings operating under a CLIA Certificate of Waiver, Certificate of Compliance, or Certificate of Accreditation. Entities that intend to perform only CLIA-waived laboratory studies may obtain a [CLIA Certificate of Waiver](#) and submit it to Suzanne Leavitt, RN MS, the State Survey Agency Director, at Suzanne.Leavitt@vermont.gov

How to Obtain Abbott BinaxNOW™ COVID-19 Antigen Tests

Request Abbott BinaxNOW™ test kits through the [Health Department Laboratory](#).

If you have any questions, please contact the HAN Coordinator at 802-859-5900 or vthan@vermont.gov.

HAN Message Type Definitions

Health Alert: Conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention.

Health Advisory: Provides important information for a specific incident or situation may not require immediate action.

Health Update: Provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; unlikely to require immediate action.

Info Service Message: Provides general correspondence from VDH, which is not necessarily considered to be of an emergent nature.