

# Media Release

**The Hon Martin Foley MP**  
Minister for Health  
Minister for Ambulance Services  
Minister for Equality



Thursday, 6 January 2022

## **SENSIBLE STEPS TO REDUCE TESTING QUEUES AND TRANSMISSION**

In the biggest change to the COVID-19 testing system since the beginning of the pandemic, Victorians won't have to line up to get a PCR test and wait for their result to be diagnosed with COVID-19 – meaning shorter wait times and faster access to clinical care.

Under new pandemic orders that come into effect at 11.59pm tonight, people who test positive on a Rapid Antigen Test (RAT) will be considered *probable* cases and be subject to the same requirements as confirmed cases from a PCR test – they must isolate immediately for seven days and notify their contacts.

It will be mandatory to report the result of a positive RAT to the Department of Health through an online form or by phone – ensuring people can access the care and information they need, including monitoring for worsening symptoms and financial support for isolation.

Once a probable case has reported their positive RAT result, they will be asked questions about their symptoms and directly provided critical information about their next steps, how long they must isolate and how they can get care and advice – just as they would if they tested positive on a PCR test. Probable cases will be reported alongside confirmed cases in Victoria's daily numbers.

Until RATs are in increased supply, Victorians who have symptoms, or asymptomatic household contacts required to use RATs, can still get a PCR test if they can't access any RATs.

Moving forward, this change means PCR testing can increasingly be reserved for confirmation of clinical diagnoses in vulnerable settings and critical workforce testing.

A PCR test continues to be recommended for people who test positive on a RAT but don't have symptoms and who aren't contacts. Due to the increased accuracy of RATs in higher-risk groups, PCR tests will be discouraged for contacts or people with symptoms.

The online and phone reporting system will go live on 7 January. The process includes a series of simple questions including a symptom check for triaging care. Privacy will be protected, and translation support will be available through the Coronavirus hotline.

In addition, the new pandemic orders require that a density quotient of one person per two square metres be introduced indoors at hospitality venues, including restaurants, cafés, pubs and nightclubs along with along with entertainment venues including arcades and amusement parks, casinos and gaming venues across Victoria.

This change is similar to the measures already in place in New South Wales and aims to reduce the risk of superspreader events in these settings. It is also recommended that entertainment and hospitality venues and their patrons opt for seated service only and avoid indoor dancefloors.

It is strongly recommended that if possible you undertake a RAT prior to visiting aged care facilities or hospitals.

The strong recommendation to work from home and study from home for adult education if you can will remain in place until Australia Day – this will continue to be assessed.

Non-urgent elective surgery will temporarily be reduced for public and private hospitals in metropolitan Melbourne and major regional cities across Victoria, helping hospitals respond to the increasing number of patients with coronavirus.

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All emergency surgery and urgent elective surgery will continue. Elective surgery procedures where the patient is already scheduled for admission on 6 and 7 January may still occur where it is not safe or logistically possible to postpone.

Yesterday, free RATs were successfully distributed at four of the state's largest testing centres as part of a pilot which is continuing today and tomorrow – while Victoria awaits the arrival of the first significant delivery of the 44 million ordered tests.

More information on how Victorians can report their Rapid Antigen Result will be on the Coronavirus website from 7 January. Information on updated COVIDSafe settings will also be published when the orders come into effect. Remember to book your third dose, or your child's first dose, at [www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/vaccine](http://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/vaccine).

#### **Quotes attributable to Minister for Health Martin Foley**

*“Rapid Antigen Tests will be the way most Victorians can confirm they have COVID-19 – they are very accurate among contacts and people with symptoms, and there'll be no queuing for hours or waiting for days for a result.”*

*“People who test positive on a Rapid Antigen Test must isolate and tell their contacts – just like someone who tests positive on a PCR – and they will also be required to report their positive result.”*

*“Now is the right time to introduce these sensible density quotients in high-risk indoor entertainment and hospitality settings, to reduce the risk of superspreader events that can infect hundreds.”*

*The pandemic orders were made under s165AI of the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 after consideration of advice from the Acting Chief Health Officer. The pandemic orders were issued under powers granted by the making of a pandemic declaration under the Public Health and Wellbeing Act on 10 December. They are in effect for four weeks, and then for three months for every subsequent order. The order, the CHO advice, the Minister's Statement of Reasons and the Human Rights Statement will be published on the Department's website within seven days of the orders coming into effect.*