



16 March 2022

Rapid antigen tests

RATs for WA health staff

All WA Health and WA public-private partnership (PPP) hospital staff who, whilst at the workplace, are advised of the requirement to have a RAT, will be provided sufficient RATs for testing.

For example, if a staff member is at work when they receive advice that they have been identified as a close contact (e.g. at home or in the community).

A voluntary RAT every 72 hours will be provided to all staff working in WA public hospitals and healthcare facilities, including WA PPP hospitals.

As this is an expansion of current arrangements, implementation begins today and will be fully implemented by 21 March.

WA free RAT program

Staff are also encouraged to take advantage of the [WA Government's free RAT program](#), which has been expanded to provide an additional 10 tests to each WA household, in addition to the 5 previously announced in February.

If you have already received your initial 5 RATs via collection or registered for delivery, the additional 10 RATs will be delivered to the address you nominated when you registered for your first order, so you don't need to do anything further.

Guidance for using RATs other workplaces

The [Guidance for the use of RATs in workplaces](#) recommends that workplaces **do not** use RATs for widespread screening of asymptomatic staff.

RATs are most effective when they are used to test people with symptoms of COVID-19. As a result, the Department of Health recommends RATs are used for testing people who are symptomatic, in most settings.

The guidance provides further advice for higher risk workplaces and asymptomatic critical worker close contacts.

Updated mask guidance

While vaccination remains the most effective intervention for prevention of disease, the use of a mask is a simple and effective way to further reduce the risk of contracting and transmitting COVID-19.

The [updated guidance](#) provides advice on wearing masks in the community and in general, healthcare and high-risk, client-facing workplaces.

In healthcare settings, the use of particulate filter respirators (PFRs) is recommended during high-risk aerosol generating procedures, and for protection against infections known to be spread by the airborne route.

It is recommended that PFRs are worn instead of surgical masks if a risk assessment suggests a likely high risk of transmission, and that healthcare workers using PFRs should be fit-tested and trained in their correct use.

Travelling in vehicles

All staff are reminded that people travelling together in a vehicle are required to wear a face mask if they are not from the same household. This applies to personal and work vehicles.

Eating, drinking and meal breaks

Practise physical distancing when taking meal breaks and only remove masks when actually eating and drinking.

Always wear your mask when conversing with other colleagues, even during meal breaks.

Consider choosing an outside location for meal breaks when the weather permits.

Waste management

Staff should practice standard precautions when handling any waste.

Only waste that is **contaminated with blood or body fluids** is classified as clinical waste. Most waste generated in our healthcare facilities, including all personal protective equipment (such as gowns, gloves, face shields and masks) can be classified as general waste.

Used rapid antigen tests can also be disposed of into general waste.

All waste shall be bagged and securely sealed prior to transporting for disposal.

[Adhere to the Code of Practice for Clinical and Related Waste management](#) for classification and disposal of general, clinical and sharps waste.

Support CALD community vaccination

Bilingual or bicultural staff are invited to participate in health promotion activities aimed at increasing COVID-19 vaccine uptake in culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities where vaccination rates are lower than the general population.

Expressions of interest are welcome from staff who are either a:

- healthcare worker and native speaker of a language other than English
- member of, or are connected to, communities that speak a language other than English.

Staff will be supported by the WA COVID-19 Vaccination Program team and remunerated for their time. Resources and training will also be provided.

[Visit the intranet](#) for more information about the nominated priority languages and to register your interest by Monday 28 March 2022.

Hospital visitor guidelines reminder

The [Public Hospital Visitor Guidelines](#), updated on Thursday 11 March, are available on the Department of Health website.

The Guidelines state that essential visitors are permitted to remain with patients outside standard visiting hours.

In addition, while restricting access to essential visitors is preferred, one other visitor per patient is permitted during designated visiting hours. A patient may have more than one visitor during a day, but visitation is limited to one visitor per 2-hour visiting period.

SHICC turns 2

This week marks 2 years since the State Health Incident Coordination Centre (SHICC) was stood up in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

It comes at the height of Western Australia's response to COVID-19 as the State approaches its peak caseload of the Omicron variant.

The planning and coordination efforts of SHICC staff over the past 2 years have enabled the WA health system and the State to confidently respond to this major outbreak.

During this time, the SHICC has played a key role in the management of Western Australia's hotel quarantine program, vessel and community outbreaks, and the State's COVID-19 vaccination program.

All staff, both in the SHICC and throughout the WA health system, are thanked for their hard work and continuing dedication to the health and wellbeing of our community.

COVID-19 staff update webinar

All WA health system staff are invited to weekly COVID-19 update webinars presented by senior COVID-19 response executives.

Webinars are scheduled each week on Tuesdays – visit the [Health Point home page](#) to learn weekly topics and presenters and to access the MS Teams invitation as times may vary.

[A recording of this week's webinar is available](#) on the staff intranet, which featured leading physicians from Perth's tertiary hospitals who explored the case mix of COVID-19 presentations in our health system.