Health Update

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Clarified COVID-19 Antigen Testing Guidance

Current Situation

Use of COVID-19 antigen testing is becoming more widespread. Antigen tests directly detect fragments of SARS-CoV-2 viral protein (as opposed to viral RNA detected by nucleic acid amplification tests [NAAT a.k.a. RT-PCR tests]). The main advantages of antigen tests include fast turnaround time, simple point-of-care use, detection of acute viral infection, and lower cost. However, the clinical performance of rapid antigen diagnostic tests largely depends on the circumstances in which they are used. Therefore, the Federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has approved the use of COVID-19 antigen testing among symptomatic individuals only. The Monterey County Health Department is providing the following guidance on use of antigen tests and reporting of test results.

Testing Guidance

1. Antigen tests are approved by the FDA for use with symptomatic individuals only. No antigen test has yet been approved by the FDA for use on asymptomatic individuals.

2. Best test performance is achieved when specimens are collected within 5 to 7 days of symptom onset (depending on manufacturer specifications).

3. Ensure staff are trained on specimen collection methods that are consistent with manufacturer’s directions. Specimen quality can affect test performance.

4. Dry swabs should be used for all antigen tests. Viral transport medium should not be used. False positive test results have been reported when swabs are placed in viral transport medium prior to testing.
5. Antigen testing should not be used to screen asymptomatic individuals, to release a person from isolation or quarantine, or to clear a person to return to work.

6. Use the decision tree below to interpret antigen results, isolate patients, and follow up with RT-PCR testing (Figure 1).

![COVID-19 Antigen Test Interpretation Diagram]

Figure 1.

7. In addition to submitting a Confidential Morbidity Report (CMR) form for all positive test results (https://www.co.monterey.ca.us/home/showdocument?id=76303), providers must also report all positive and negative antigen tests performed for diagnostic and screening purposes to the Monterey County Health Department via the CalREDIE Manual Lab Report (MLR) Portal:
   - Account registration form: https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/CDPH%20Document%20Library/MLR_Account_Request_Form.pdf

**Health Alert:** Warrants immediate action or attention. **Health Advisory:** Provides 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.
Additional Resources

- Self-Isolation Instructions:
  - English: [https://www.co.monterey.ca.us/home/showdocument?id=95180](https://www.co.monterey.ca.us/home/showdocument?id=95180)
  - Spanish: [https://www.co.monterey.ca.us/home/showdocument?id=95178](https://www.co.monterey.ca.us/home/showdocument?id=95178)
- Self-Quarantine Instructions:
  - English: [https://www.co.monterey.ca.us/home/showdocument?id=95176](https://www.co.monterey.ca.us/home/showdocument?id=95176)
  - Spanish: [https://www.co.monterey.ca.us/home/showdocument?id=95174](https://www.co.monterey.ca.us/home/showdocument?id=95174)
- Infographic to Assess Exposure Risk:
  - English: [https://www.co.monterey.ca.us/home/showdocument?id=92544](https://www.co.monterey.ca.us/home/showdocument?id=92544)
  - Spanish: [https://www.co.monterey.ca.us/home/showdocument?id=92542](https://www.co.monterey.ca.us/home/showdocument?id=92542)
- Monterey County Health Department Communicable Disease Unit:
  - Phone: 831-755-4521 during normal business hours; 831-755-5100 after hours and ask for the Hazardous Materials Team, who will connect you with the on-call Health Officer
  - [www.mtyhd.org/COVID19](http://www.mtyhd.org/COVID19)

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