

COVID-19 Procedure for testing of quarantine workers as approved by the CHO

Persons who are required to quarantine

Persons required to quarantine are defined in CHO Direction (49) Part 3, and any subsequent directions that amend or substantively replace these directions and include:

- A person entering the Territory from a place outside Australia, other than New Zealand.
- A person entering the Territory from a state or another Territory or New Zealand who, during the 14 days prior to entering the NT was:
 - in a place outside of Australia other than New Zealand or
 - in an area that is, at the time of the person's entry, a COVID-19 hotspot.
- A person entering the NT who refuses to make a declaration in accordance with direction 49.
- A child entering the NT in relation to whom a declaration in accordance with direction 49 is not made.

Quarantine Facility

- A quarantine facility as declared in CHO Directions (No 55) or any subsequent Directions that replace and substantially correspond to these Directions to include:
 - Howard Springs Quarantine Facility including the Centre for National Resilience
 - Todd Quarantine Facility; and
 - Ross Quarantine Facility

Quarantine Worker

A quarantine worker means any person whose employment involves carrying out functions or providing services necessary for the ordinary operation of quarantine, including the following persons:

- (a) A person who works at a quarantine facility;
- (b) A person who works at a place approved by the CHO for the purposes of quarantine. This includes a person who works at or supports a farm that has workers on it who must quarantine;
- (c) A person who works at commercial visitor accommodation used as a suitable place for quarantine;
- (d) A person who transports another person who must quarantine to or from a quarantine facility or other place for the purposes of quarantine;
- (e) A person who is employed to provide cleaning services for an aircraft or motor vehicle after the aircraft or motor vehicle has transported another person who must quarantine;
- (f) A person who screens or processes a person who must quarantine at an airport or a border of the Territory;
- (g) A person identified in this testing procedure.

Types of COVID-19 Tests

Polymerase chain reaction (PCR)

This is a type of nucleic acid test that can be used to detect SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) Ribonucleic acid (RNA). PCR tests are considered the gold standard for detecting the presence of the COVID-19 virus. False negatives still may occur, particularly in the context of asymptomatic infection.

PCR tests can be performed on a variety of different specimen types. The most common specimen collection method is a deep nasal and throat swab. PCR testing may also be performed on a sputum sample.

Saliva, either by direct saliva collection or by a swab of saliva, is another specimen type that is sometimes used, although it appears less sensitive than other specimen types. Being less sensitive means that there is a slightly higher chance of a false negative result than with other specimen types. However due to its ease of collection, and being much less invasive than a deep nasal and throat swab, saliva specimens can be useful for regular testing in a surveillance setting (i.e. for larger scale testing of asymptomatic people) or where nasal swab is more difficult to obtain (e.g. in very young children).

All of the above specimen types can be either collected by a trained healthcare worker or self-collected. Once collected, they should be dropped at a designated facility such as a Pandemic clinic or Respiratory clinic, or at a designated drop-off site within the Quarantine facility. All tests will be processed either by Territory Pathology or by another approved pathology centre or by an approved SARS-CoV-2 PCR machine. The turnaround time for PCR tests may be between 15 minutes and 24 hours, depending on the type of machine used for the PCR test. If a quick turnaround time is required, discuss with Public Health authorities.

Regardless of specimen collection method chosen, a PCR test is the only current test type accepted for use by workers whose employment requires involvement with quarantine arrangements or persons required to quarantine in the NT.

Rapid diagnostic tests for SARS-CoV2 antigen

Point of care Rapid Diagnostic Antigen tests detect the presence of viral protein from SARS-CoV-2. They provide a result within 15-30 minutes, but are less sensitive than a PCR test, even if a more sensitive specimen collection method is used. Rapid Antigen tests are best performed in the early stages of acute infection (within 5-7 days), after which antigen levels may drop significantly. A false positive result is considered unlikely, but due to an increased chance of a false negative this test type should not be relied upon, particularly in someone who is symptomatic.

This is NOT an accepted test for use by workers whose employment requires involvement with quarantine arrangements or persons required to quarantine in the NT.

Serological tests for SARS-CoV2 antibodies

Serology tests work by detecting IgG and/or IgM antibodies in a specimen. The sensitivity and specificity of antibody tests early in SARS-CoV-2 infection is not well characterised. Antibodies can take up to 2 weeks to become detectable after infection with COVID-19, so may be more useful in determining if someone has past or current infection. Because antibody testing tests do not detect active viral shedding, they cannot detect if an individual is currently infectious.

This is NOT an accepted test for use by workers whose employment requires involvement with quarantine arrangements or persons required to quarantine in the NT, unless requested by an Infectious Diseases or Public Health Physician as part of a broader risk assessment.

Employer and worker responsibilities

The employer is required to ensure:

- Workers understand their obligations under the CHO Directions for Testing of Quarantine Workers (No.6) 2021 and advise of the testing regime appropriate to their work.
- Any worker who has not been tested according to their testing regime, does not go to work.
- Accurate record keeping of worker's testing regime as evidence of the organisation's compliance.

The worker is required to:

- understand their obligations under the CHO Directions for Testing of Quarantine Workers (No.6) 2021 and comply with the testing regime appropriate to their work.
- Maintain an accurate record of their testing regime as evidence of compliance.
- Report a positive COVID-19 test result to their employer and follow the directions of the Centre for Disease Control (CDC).

Compliance

The CHO's Directions are laws and it is an offence to contravene a direction of the CHO. If a quarantine worker fails to comply with the COVID-19 testing regime, they will be directed into mandatory, supervised quarantine and will remain in quarantine for 14 days from the time of non-compliance.

Testing Regimes

The testing regime for quarantine workers varies according to the level of contact with the person in quarantine and the nature of the work undertaken in the quarantine facility. There are three testing regimes quarantine workers may undertake.

The PCR is the only current test type accepted for use by workers whose employment requires involvement with quarantine arrangements, or persons required to quarantine in the NT.

Regime 1 – tested every work day

Workers whose employment involves **daily/regular contact** with a person in quarantine (under any CHO Direction) or their immediate environment. This includes part time workers who work regularly. For example it may include clinical staff, cleaning staff and security staff working at a quarantine facility.

Workers whose employment involves regular screening of persons from international flights.

Workers are required to undertake a PCR test every day they are at work. This can be at the facility, a testing clinic or self-swabbing. This is either a throat/deep nasal swab OR a saliva test (only suitable if the worker is asymptomatic). At least once every 7 days the PCR MUST be a throat/deep nasal swab.

If a person's employment ceases they are required to complete regime 2 (intermittent testing on day 3, day 7 and day 12) for one cycle (14 days) from their last day of work.

Regime 2 – tested intermittently

Workers whose work means they have **irregular contact** with people in quarantine or enter a quarantine facility to provide occasional services. For example a bus driver that transports international passengers to quarantine, a COVID taxi driver that transports a person in their 14 days of quarantine or a casual worker that may do a shift once every two weeks.

Workers are required to undertake a PCR test on day 3, day 7 and day 12 after the last date they had contact or provided the service. If that person is still employed in quarantine work they can have their swab on the work day closest to their swab day. For example they may be swabbed on day 4, day 9 and day 14 if they are working on those days. A throat/deep nasal swab is the preferred method for these workers

Regime 3 – tested every 7 days

Authorised Officers whose employment involves **screening** a domestic person required to quarantine. For example Border Control staff at airports and border crossings.

Authorised Officers, who normally screen domestic flights, and screen persons from a single international flight, are required to complete one cycle of regime 2 testing and then continue on regime 3.

Workers whose employment involves **indirect contact** with a person required to quarantine under any CHO Direction, or their immediate environment. For example compliance officers and drivers who regularly deliver goods to a quarantine facility.

Workers are required to undertake a PCR test every 7 days or their next work day. For example if they are on a day off on day 7 and working on day 8 they can have their swab on day 8. A throat/deep nasal swab is the preferred method for these workers.

COVID-19 Policy for testing of quarantine workers

A Quarantine facility is a mandatory supervised quarantine facility for domestic and international persons.

A Quarantine arrangement includes any place where a person is undertaking quarantine as required by any CHO Direction.

Type of Worker	Regime Requirements
Regime 1	Test every work day
Authorised Officers working full time conducting compliance checks and involved in quarantine arrangements	Regime 1 while providing care in quarantine facility and Regime 2 at the completion of contract or if on leave for 7 days or more.
Workers screening travellers from international destinations on a regular basis.	Regime 1 while working with international travellers and Regime 2 at the completion of contract or if on leave for 7 days or more.
Airport workers handling baggage or otherwise involved in processing travellers from international destinations.	Regime 1 while working with international travellers and Regime 2 at the completion of contract or if on leave for 7 days or more.
Health Clinician working full time in a quarantine facility ie nurses, doctors, welfare staff	Regime 1 while providing care in quarantine facility and Regime 2 at the completion of contract and if on leave for 7 days or more.
Health Clinician working in other quarantine arrangements ie Australian Defence Force, Golden Glow	Regime 1 while providing care in quarantine facility and Regime 2 at the completion of contract or if on leave for 7 days or more.
Security Officers working in quarantine facility ie Police, Australian Defence Force and private contractors.	Regime 1 while providing care in quarantine facility and Regime 2 at the completion of contract or if on leave for 7 days or more.
Support services in quarantine facilities – hotel staff, cleaners, reception, catering/room service, maintenance	Regime 1 while providing care in quarantine facility and Regime 2 at the completion of contract
Visiting Health Clinician – daily contact with quarantine facility	Regime 1 while providing care in quarantine facility and Regime 2 at the completion of contract.
Welfare staff working in NT airports and quarantine facilities	Regime 1 while providing care in quarantine facility and Regime 2 at the completion of contract or if on leave for 7 days or more.

Type of Worker	Regime Requirements
Regime 2 - intermittent test cycle	Day 3, day 7, day 12 or the next closest work day
Ambulance entering quarantine facility	
Australian Border Force staff	
Authorised Officers who normally screen domestic flights, and screen persons from a single international flight.	Regime 2 for one cycle then resume regime 3.
Health Clinician working occasionally (casually) in a quarantine facility	
Any worker employed in a quarantine facility who is on leave for more than 7 days	
Official Visitor to quarantine facility ie audit team, politician, health official	
Visiting Health Clinician 1-2 visits ie Medical specialist	
Workers transporting people to quarantine arrangements or from a quarantine arrangement within their 14 day quarantine period ie Bus drivers, COVID taxi drivers	
Regime 3 - every 7 days	Test every 7 days
Airport staff not in direct contact with a person requiring quarantine ie cleaners, managers, administration staff, Airport ground crew	
Authorised Officers (AO) screening travellers from domestic destinations at airports and NT borders.	One cycle of Regime 2 is required if AO processes passengers from an international destination
Authorised Officers working part time conducting compliance checks ie Police who have other duties	
Security working at NT airports	
Workers providing services to quarantine facilities that do not require direct contact with staff or guests ie deliveries - mail, office supplies, waste management (collection).	

Definitions, Acronyms and Alternative Search Terms

Term	Description
CHO	Chief Health Officer
CDC	Centre for Disease Control
CNR	Centre for National Resilience
PCR	Polymerase chain reaction (PCR) - an acceptable test for detecting COVID-19 in quarantine workers