



NSW RURAL FIRE SERVICE

RAPID ANTIGEN TESTING

NSW RFS FRAMEWORK

Document Control

Release History

Version	Date	Author	Summary of changes
1.0	15/08/2021	J. Atkins	Initial document
1.1	18/08/2021	J. Atkins	Updates following DCFO review
1.2	19/08/2021	J. Atkins	Updates following DCFO review
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Related documents

Document name	Version
NSW RFS COVID-19 Response Action Process	
NSW RFS 2021/22 Bush Fire Season Operational Arrangements	
NSW RFS COVID Response Levels	

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1 Purpose

This framework has been developed to guide the delivery of high quality, safe and appropriate rapid antigen screening for COVID-19 across the NSW Rural Fire Service (NSW RFS).

This is in order to:

- support uptake of frequent COVID-19 rapid antigen testing across NSW RFS;
- increase the proportion of people who can access frequent testing;
- enhance the safe working environments of the NSW RFS by increased screening for COVID-19 infection; and,
- comply with Public Health Orders as required.

2 Background

Rapid Antigen Testing (RAT) has been introduced across industry to provide additional support to ensure the safety of workers and the community in the current COVID-19 pandemic. RAT provides a quick and efficient screening measure for COVID-19.

Although these tests have some limitations when compared to the nose and throat swabs undertaken with a laboratory Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) test, rapid antigen screening can be performed easily and onsite with results available within minutes.

Frequent rapid antigen screening can reduce the number of new infections in the community, especially amongst people who do not show any symptoms. To maximise the public health benefit, screening individuals 2–3 times per week is recommended.

Further information relating to RAT can be found can be found at: <https://www.nsw.gov.au/covid-19/stay-safe/testing/how-testing-works/rapid-antigen-self-tests-for-community>

The location of PCR testing sites across NSW can be found [here](#).

3 Rapid Antigen Test Kits

NSW RFS has worked closely with NSW Health and the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) requirements to procure and implement RAT across the organisation.

NSW RFS has procured two types of the RAT kits. Both of the test kits are an effective way to screen for COVID-19 and have been reviewed and endorsed by the TGA. Importantly, both kits have been endorsed to detect the current known variants of COVID-19.

The Atomo test involves collecting swabs from the Anterior Nares (2cm inside the nose) with the collection stick. The swab is then mixed with a solution and rests for 10 minutes for a result.

A video of the Atomo test can be found [here](#).

The Atomo kits are only approved for use by an authorised and trained individual, with appropriate medical oversight.

The TGA has approved a total of 21 rapid antigen tests for self-use. These tests must meet stringent requirements by the TGA; which are internationally aligned with other jurisdictions, to ensure only high quality tests that are simple to use are approved.

The Path DX test has been approved for 'self-test' use, and is available for use within NSW RFS.

The Path DX test is a simple test, that involves holding the test collection pen in one's mouth for two minutes, then placing the pen into a solution, and waiting approximately 15 minutes for a result.

A video of the Path DX test can be found [here](#).

4 Rapid Antigen Testing in NSW RFS

NSW RFS introduced RAT as another tool to support the ongoing health and wellbeing of members across the organisation and to support other agencies working with us.

The testing may be used to assist the NSW RFS to ensure workplaces, Brigades, base camps, District and Area Offices, Incident Management Teams and other higher priority settings are as safe as possible.

RAT does not replace the usual COVID-19 precautions including masks, hand hygiene and distancing rules that must remain in place, as well as the need for vaccination of NSW RFS members. This includes not coming to work or attending an NSW RFS facility (or incident) if unwell, or when isolating as instructed to by NSW Health.

There are two types of testing conducted within the NSW RFS being Organisational and Brigade Self Testing.

4.1 Organisational Testing

St John Ambulance provides testing at NSW RFS Headquarters, Glendenning and the State Training Academy.

Organisational testing is conducted a minimum of every 2 days, inclusive of initial or single shifts/workdays across the NSW RFS at identified sites/offices. NSW RFS may also identify high priority settings where daily RAT will occur. This is to ensure those working within high priority settings are regularly screened to ensure the safety of those within the environment.

Further information can be found in Section 5.

4.2 Brigade Self Testing

Brigade Self Testing has been introduced for Brigades to conduct their own testing for members.

Brigade self-testing can be conducted based on the local risk and operational profile, that may include:

- number of local cases;
- increased numbers of persons within the facility environment (including contractors);
- during initial response to an incident;
- Strike Teams deployments;
- Other planned activities such as hazard reduction.

Further information can be found in Section 6.

5 Organisational Testing

The TGA requires oversight of any non 'self-test' RAT kits to be conducted by a Health Practitioner (as defined by the TGA. The TGA have advised that a Paramedic is deemed a "health practitioner" for the purpose of rapid antigen testing.

St John Ambulance Australia has been engaged by NSW RFS to provide medical oversight and clinical support for RAT which is conducted in identified offices and sites on a regular basis.

NSW RFS will engage additional providers to facilitate this testing as a potential redundancy where necessary.

5.1 Training

Given the dynamic nature with establishing Incident Management Teams, base camps and briefings, NSW RFS members may be identified and requested to undertake training to conduct antigen testing using non 'self-test' RAT kits under the oversight of a health practitioner.

St John Ambulance and NSW RFS will provide training in both the administration of the testing kits and the associated administration.

The training involves a short video review as well as practical application of the training by the St John Ambulance lead trainer. RAT training is anticipated to be completed within 60 minutes.

5.2 Testing Sites

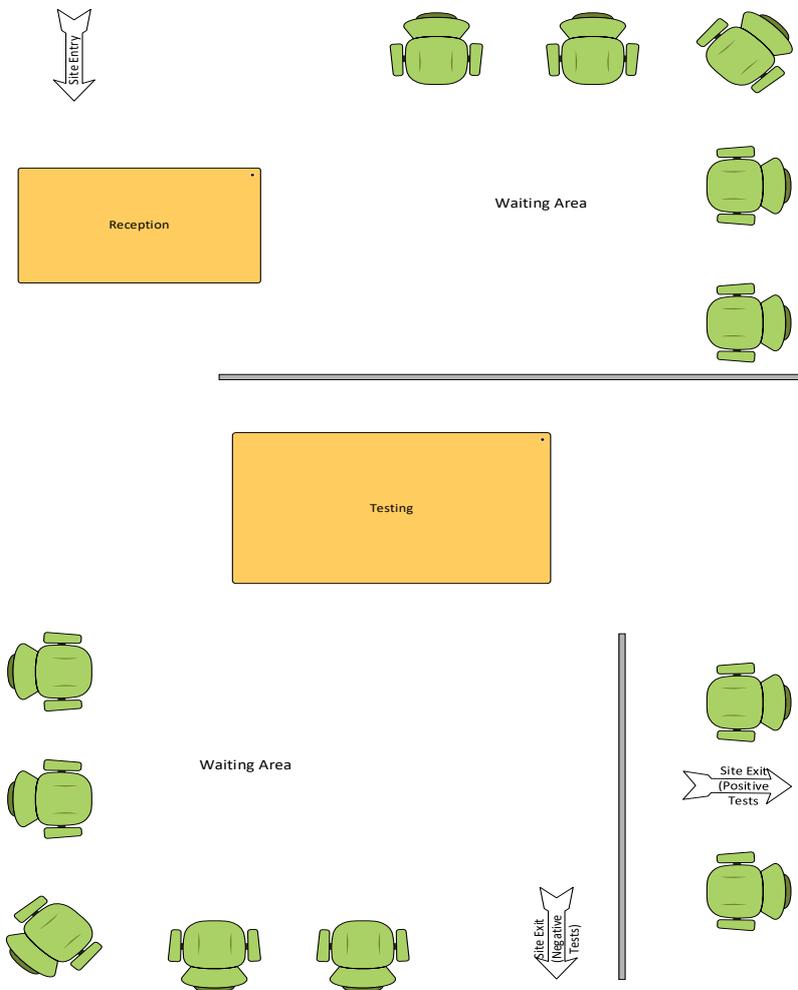
Testing sites are to be identified by the officer responsible for each facility or incident, and will need to determine the suitability of the proposed location to ensure it is both safe and easily accessible.

Each site is to be sign posted so members can find it easily and are appropriately spaced while waiting to be tested. The site will have a logical flow through, while allowing appropriate separation and isolation should a positive result be returned.

As new sites (such as Incident Management Team and base camps) are established, NSW RFS will endeavour to respond RAT capacity as soon as practicable. Testing sites should be well considered to ensure sufficient space and flow requirements are met.

The NSW Chief Health Officer has endorsed the [Indicative Process Tool](#) to assist in the establishment of testing sites.

A diagram of a suggested testing site flow is depicted below.



5.3 Signage & Communication

The responsible officer is to ensure appropriate signage is erected indicating the location of the site and any other relevant information. Advice for members ahead of screening is to be available.

The officer responsible is to ensure that information relating to reasons for the test, the testing procedure, and actions following the results are clearly understood and acknowledged by members.

5.4 Personal Protection Equipment, Consumables and Waste

The officer responsible is to determine the anticipated demand for stock and the safe storage & re-supply of both test kits and supporting materials including personal protective equipment (PPE).

Standard PPE is to be used at all times during testing and handling of any materials relating to testing. This included:

- gloves
- eye protection
- face mask
- gown

Used test kits are considered biohazard waste and require special disposal arrangements. Used test kits must be disposed of in appropriately marked biohazard waste bag and taken to an appropriate facility for disposal.

Used PPE is considered general waste (materials are not recyclable) and do not require special disposal arrangements, however it is recommended that waste be disposed of safely and in sealed rubbish containers. Regular emptying of rubbish containers should be undertaken to avoid overflow or the need to touch used materials again, once disposed of.

Further information can regarding waste management can be found [here](#).

5.5 Medical Records

Each test conducted will be recorded by the NSW RFS through an established process (currently QR code). There are reporting requirements regarding test numbers and results noting all information collected will be de-identified.

All tests that are administered **must** be recorded using the NSW RFS QR code process. Each test recording will be considered a medical record for the individual, and will require personal information to be provided prior to the test being conducted. The Public Health Unit of NSW Health, may request information relating to testing procedures and results.

NSW RFS will ensure all documentation is maintained in accordance with the *Privacy Act (1988)* and associated regulations.

Medical records and related information will only be released to NSW Health with the knowledge, consent and understanding of the individual except in the case of a positive result at which time records will be provided to NSW Health in accordance with the Public Health Order.

5.6 Test Results

5.6.1 Positive Results

NSW RFS members who return a positive RAT result must follow the current advice from [NSW Health](#) and the [NSW RFS Response Action Process](#).

5.6.2 NSW RFS notifications

NSW RFS members returning a positive RAT test must advise their chain of command who will notify the Operational Communications Centre (OCC) by telephoning 1800 677 677, noting a member may alert the OCC if their chain of command is uncontactable.

5.6.3 NSW Health Notifications

When a person has a positive rapid antigen test result, they must follow the [advice for people testing positive for COVID-19](#) and self-isolate for 7 days from the date of the positive rapid antigen test.

All personnel must register their positive test result as soon as possible by visiting the Service NSW app or [website](#) noting this is a Public Health Order requirement.

By providing NSW Health with your test result, it will enable the best care and recovery plan to be made available.

5.6.4 Negative Results

Negative RAT results from organisational testing must be recorded in the NSW RFS established process (QR code), which will be actioned by St John Ambulance. There is no requirement to notify NSW Health of a negative RAT result.

Additional information can be found [here](#).

6 Brigade Self-Testing

On 01 November 2021, the TGA announced the introduction of 'self-test' RAT kits.

For a test kit to be considered suitable with the TGA, it must meet a series of strict criteria to be considered. These criteria include:

- instructions for use are written in a way that all consumers can understand;
- suppliers having appropriate support available for example, YouTube videos, 1800 hotline and website fact sheets for consumers to seek help or ask questions;
- usability testing has been successful with untrained, unsupervised users; and
- self-tests perform satisfactorily against variants such as Delta, noting that many tests in the international market were developed prior to the Delta variant becoming predominant.

NSW RFS uses the Path DX RAT kit which has been TGA approved for 'self-use'.

Self-Testing RAT has been made available and implemented at Brigades Station to increase member safety, as well as Area & District Offices who will have access to clinical support from St John Ambulance as required.

There is an established process through State Logistics whereby Brigades and Area/District Offices can request initial and resupply RAT kits.

6.1 Training

The Path DX RAT kit does not require formalised training as it is approved for 'self-test' use.

NSW RFS, along with St John Ambulance, has developed an information package to support members with using the Path DX testing kits.

6.2 Storage & Disposal

Self-test RAT kits should be stored in a safe, dry, cool space. Refer to the test kit instructions.

Disposal will vary according to information provided with the test instructions. Some tests come with a plastic bag to place the contents of the test into (including the swab).

This bag is then placed into another bag for disposal with the household rubbish. Test kit materials are not recyclable.

If no bags are provided Brigades may place the used items from the test into a small plastic bag that can be sealed. This bag should be put into another bag that can be sealed and disposed of in the facility/household rubbish.

Member should wash their hands carefully after completing the test and disposing of the test kit contents.

Further information can regarding waste management can be found [here](#).

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Each test recording will be considered a medical record for the individual, and will require personal information to be provided prior to the test being conducted. The Public Health Unit of NSW Health, may request information relating to testing procedures and results.

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6.4 Test Results

6.4.1 Positive Results

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NSW RFS members returning a positive RAT test must advise their chain of command who will notify the Operational Communications Centre (OCC) by telephoning 1800 677 677, noting a member may alert the OCC if their chain of command is uncontactable.

6.4.3 NSW Health Notifications

When a person has a positive rapid antigen test result, they must follow the [advice for people testing positive for COVID-19](#) and self-isolate for 7 days from the date of the positive rapid antigen test.

All personnel must register their positive test result as soon as possible by visiting the Service NSW app or [website](#) noting this is a Public Health Order requirement. By providing NSW Health with your test result, it will enable the best care and recovery plan to be made available.

6.4.4 Negative Results

Brigades undertaking self-testing are not required to notify NSW RFS or NSW Health of negative results however should continue to monitor for symptoms.

Additional information can be found [here](#).

7 Compliance

For all personnel performing duties at any identified high priority setting, or who are subject to Public Health Order requirements, RAT is mandatory to help ensure the safety of NSW RFS, our members and partner agencies.

NSW RFS considers mandatory RAT under these circumstances to be a lawful and reasonable direction and any breach will be subject to management action, including reporting to other agencies where their personnel do not comply.

Should any person refuse a RAT, they will not be permitted to perform any duties and will be immediately requested to leave the NSW RFS site or facility.