

Access to PCR Testing from 1 January 2023

The Australian Government is committed to supporting effective COVID-19 testing to limit the spread and ensure that those most at risk of severe disease have fast access to care and treatments. PCR tests remain free for everyone who needs them. Priority populations can access them free through state testing sites and GP-led Respiratory Clinics. And anyone whose GP or nurse practitioner requests a PCR test for them will be bulk billed. Further details are below.

Individuals are able to access PCR testing via a range of channels including:

- State and territory testing clinics, hospitals, and GP-led Respiratory Clinics
 - o All these testing facilities can be accessed without a request
- GPs and nurse practitioners can request a COVID-19 PCR test from a pathology provider for their patient as part of clinical management.
 - o these tests, provided out-of-hospital, must be bulk-billed by the pathology provider
- In-reach testing is available for individuals in residential aged care homes experiencing an outbreak through the Department of Health and Aged Care, in consultation with public health units
- First Nations and remote communities can access the remote Point of Care Testing program which will continue multiplex model testing for COVID-19, Influenza A, Influenza B, and respiratory syncytial virus, allowing prompt identification and treatment for respiratory illnesses with similar symptoms to COVID-19.

From 2023 testing arrangements are remaining largely the same, as states and territories and the Commonwealth have been working together to adapt our response throughout the pandemic.

Most states and territories have already moved to prioritise PCR testing for those most vulnerable to severe illness and death.

Individuals who are a lower risk are encouraged to use Rapid Antigen Tests (RATs), however if they continue to experience symptoms, they can still access PCR testing from state and territory clinics without a request.

The Commonwealth is committed to ensuring there is access to fast and effective COVID-19 testing and is continuing to provide funding to states and territories to support testing throughout 2023.

This approach will include the establishment of a new National Partnership Agreement to Protect Priority Groups from COVID-19 to help states and territories target PCR testing and vaccine uptake at those most at risk of severe COVID-19 and death – safeguarding the health system. Under this Partnership, the Commonwealth will continue to fund PCR testing 50:50 with state and territory governments.

In 2022 Australia moved to test for COVID-19 alongside other respiratory illnesses. This model of testing for COVID-19, Influenza A, Influenza B, and respiratory syncytial virus, allows prompt identification and treatment for respiratory illnesses with similar symptoms to COVID-19.

2023 national approach to COVID-19 testing

It is important that every Australian knows when and how they should test for COVID-19 and what to do next – whether it's staying home when unwell, taking a RAT and monitoring symptoms, or getting quick access to antiviral treatments.

Low-risk population	Low risk, with close contact to high-risk population	High-risk population
<p>Low risk people are encouraged to stay home when feeling sick.</p> <p>They should take a RAT if they have respiratory and/or other COVID-19 symptoms.</p> <p>If a positive COVID-19 result is received, stay home where possible and if you must leave, wear a mask and avoid high-risk settings.</p> <p>Continue to monitor symptoms, and engage early with your primary care provider if symptoms worsen.</p>	<p>Low-risk people who live or work with people who are high risk, particularly for COVID-19, are encouraged to take a RAT if they have respiratory and/or other COVID-19 symptoms and stay home when feeling sick. If symptoms persist following a negative RAT, these people should get a PCR through a GP or normal referral pathway.</p> <p>People entering high-risk settings will be encouraged to continue to use RATs for screening and diagnosis to prevent further transmission.</p>	<p>People in high-risk populations who are at risk of severe COVID-19 and would benefit from antiviral treatments will be prioritised for PCR testing and engagement with primary care services.</p> <p>If you are at risk of severe COVID-19, you should consult with your primary care provider about your eligibility for antiviral treatments and create a plan to ensure fast access to treatment.</p> <p>Those at higher risk of severe COVID-19 include: older Australians, First Nations people, people with disability, people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, people living in remote communities, people with complex underlying health conditions and the immunocompromised.</p>