Antigen testing in Montgomery County is a powerful tool for controlling the spread of COVID-19. Montgomery County Office of Public Health (MCOPH) continues to strive to reduce the risk of in-school COVID-19 transmission through the use of multiple mitigation strategies to support safe, in-person learning opportunities. MCOPH has previously utilized guidance provided by the Pennsylvania Department of Health (PADOH) for Point of Care Antigen Testing Use and Interpretation, PADOH 548-01-22-UPD. This Public Health Advisory provides revised recommendations specific to laboratory-based POC antigen testing for school entities within Montgomery County.

Background:
Research and assessment of the sensitivity and specificity of Point of Care (POC) antigen testing for the detection of the SARS-CoV-2 infection has been ongoing. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) identifies the sensitivity (meaning a true positive is more likely) is generally moderate to high at times of peak viral load, when individuals with a COVID-19 infection are most likely to transmit the virus to others.

Further, the CDC has identified that specificity of antigen testing is high, which means that a false positive test result is less likely as long as testing is completed according to manufacturer’s instructions. Specificity increases when individuals are symptomatic or have known exposure.

Interpretation: The following diagram outlines updates to recommendations for interpretation of CLIA Certified Point of Care antigen testing in K-12 school entities. CLIA Certified Point of Care (POC) Antigen Testing is antigen testing perform under an oversight laboratory using their CLIA certificate. This includes Project ACE-IT, Physicians’ Offices, Urgent Care facilities, and pharmacies. At-home antigen testing is not accepted as CLIA Certified POC antigen testing.
Separation of Symptomatic by Exposure Type: Multiple respiratory illnesses, such as the common cold and Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV), can cause symptoms similar to COVID-19. Thus, it is important when assessing the likelihood of COVID-19 to differentiate between individuals who have had a known exposure to COVID-19 in the 14 days before symptom onset and no known exposure in the 14 days before symptom onset.

Known exposure is an individual who has been in close contact with someone who is infected with COVID-19.

Close contact is defined as being within 6ft for 15 minutes or more consecutively or living in a household with someone infected with COVID-19.

Symptomatic, No Known Exposure (within 14 days) and Antigen Negative: MCOPH recommends that when an individual has COVID-19-like symptoms (see CDC Symptoms of COVID-19), but has no known exposure to COVID-19 in that 14 days before obtaining an antigen test, the that a negative antigen test result is acceptable to rule out COVID-19. Individuals are no longer recommended to follow-up with PCR testing when symptomatic, no known exposure and antigen negative. For individuals who experiencing symptoms and receive a negative antigen test, schools should continue to exclude symptomatic individuals from school according to the school’s sick policy. Symptomatic individuals should remember to STAY HOME WHILE SICK.
If COVID-like symptoms persist after the initial negative antigen result, individuals should be assessed by a health care provider or serial antigen testing should be considered. Serial antigen testing includes frequent antigen testing two to three times a week to manage risk and provide convenient and quick prevention of the spread of COVID-19.

Overall, a negative antigen test in an individual who is symptomatic has a low probability of false negative. When a negative antigen is obtained early in the onset of symptoms (within 7 days) it increases the likelihood that an individual has a detectable viral load which would cause an antigen test to be positive.

**Asymptomatic, Known Exposure (within 14 days), and Antigen Positive:** MCOPH recommends that an individual who is not having symptoms but has a known exposure within 14 days before obtaining an antigen test, a positive antigen test result is accepted as a diagnosis for COVID-19. Individuals will no longer be recommended to follow-up with PCR testing when they have an antigen-positive result. This individual should be considered infected with COVID-19 and school entities should immediately exclude and isolate the positive individual and initiate contact tracing.

Overall, an asymptomatic individual, with known exposure to a case of COVID in the last 14 days, who tests antigen-positive has a higher likelihood of a true positive and diagnosis with COVID-19. Research has found that a range of up to 50% of those infected with COVID-19 are carriers that show no symptoms.

**References:**


*Food and Drug Administration. BinaxNOW COVID-19 Ag card (PN 195–000)—instructions for use. 2020 Dec [cited 2021 Mar 15].* [https://www.fda.gov/media/141570/download](https://www.fda.gov/media/141570/download)


*Longitudinal Assessment of Diagnostic Test Performance Over the Course of Acute SARS-CoV-2 Infection, June 20, 2021* [https://academic.oup.com/jid/article/224/6/976/6311835](https://academic.oup.com/jid/article/224/6/976/6311835)


**Montgomery County Office of Public Health COVID-19 School Isolation and Quarantine**

For the update, COVID-19 school exclusion requirements and recommendations visit [www.montcopa.org/schoolguidance](http://www.montcopa.org/schoolguidance)
Testing Locations throughout Montgomery County:
For Montgomery County Office of Public Health COVID-19 testing locations
visit: www.montcopa.org/testing

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For additional COVID-19 testing locations throughout the county visit PADOH COVID-19
symptoms and testing: https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/disease/coronavirus/Pages/Symptoms-
Testing.aspx

COVID-19 (SARS CoV-2) is reportable to the OPH under Chapter 3 of the Montgomery County
Public Health Code and PA Code, Title 28, Chapter 27. School entities and health care providers
can report cases of COVID-19 to MCOPH's Division of Communicable Disease Control and
Prevention at 610-278-5117.

For MCOPH after-hours: evenings, weekends, and holidays contact: Montgomery County Police
Radio at (610) 275-1222 and ask to speak to the person on-call for the OPH.

For additional information on General Disease Reporting: www.montcopa.org/DiseaseReporting