

Media Release

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Monday, 8 November 2021

FREE RAPID ANTIGEN TESTING TO KEEP VICTORIAN SCHOOLS SAFE

The Victorian Government is making schools safer for students and staff and reducing the disruption caused by coronavirus outbreaks, with the roll-out of free, at-home rapid antigen tests for schools.

With rapid antigen tests now approved for self-administered use across Australia, the tests will be rolled out to up to 20 schools affected by coronavirus outbreaks this week, before broader distribution to all schools – government, independent and Catholic – with students in isolation from 15 November.

At-home rapid antigen tests will be offered to unvaccinated students – primarily those aged under 12 – who are primary close contacts as a result of a positive case at school.

The program will allow them to return to school after seven days of quarantine, rather than 14 days, provided they take a negative PCR test on day six, and then complete negative rapid antigen tests at home each day and return a negative result before school on days eight to 14 of their quarantine period.

This will mean young students who can't yet be vaccinated can return to school a week earlier than usual – bringing them in line with fully vaccinated members of the community and giving kids the time they need in class, while protecting school communities from the spread of coronavirus.

The Government has already secured 200,000 rapid antigen tests for schools, with more to arrive each week. The tests, which will be provided free of charge, can indicate a result for coronavirus within 15-30 minutes.

The program will run on an opt-in basis and fully vaccinated children, who are already only required to quarantine for only 7 days, will not participate.

The program will run alongside medical trials of rapid antigen testing in school communities, administered by nurses that are being conducted by the Doherty Institute to assess the feasibility of at-home test use.

The Government will use information from both projects to strengthen the use of at-home rapid antigen testing in school communities throughout Term Four, while continuing work to make schools as low-risk as possible.

The Therapeutic Goods Administration has approved rapid antigen testing for home use from November 1. The tests are used to check whether a person is likely to have coronavirus, but a standard PCR test is still needed to confirm a positive infection.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Education James Merlino

“For kids and their families who are excited to get back to school, having to quarantine can be really frustrating – these rapid antigen tests will cut that time and get kids back in the classroom sooner.”

“This is another way we’re making learning as COVIDSafe as possible while keeping schools open.”