

# Media Release

**The Hon Mary-Anne Thomas MP**

Leader of the House

Minister for Health

Minister for Health Infrastructure

Minister for Medical Research



Thursday, 22 December 2022

## FREE RAPID ANTIGEN TESTS FOR VICTORIANS

The Andrews Labor Government is expanding access to rapid antigen tests and making them available for free to all Victorians for the remainder of the year, to help with early Covid detection and treatment ahead of Christmas and the New Year.

Minister for Health Mary-Anne Thomas today announced all Victorians will be eligible to pick up two free packets of RATs at any state testing site until 31 December, with no eligibility requirement.

RATs are the primary tool for early detection of Covid and a positive result enables access to antivirals for those who are eligible and will benefit most.

With access to RATs expanding significantly this year, demand for state-funded PCR testing has steadily declined and from 31 December 2022 all of Victoria's remaining state-run PCR testing sites will close.

Victoria's nine remaining state-run mobile vaccination services, operated by local public health units, will also cease operating by 31 December – as most Victorians are getting vaccinated locally through GPs and pharmacies.

Following the closure of state-run PCR testing sites, local councils currently providing free RATs to eligible members of the community will be supported by the Government to provide free RATs to all Victorians until June 2023.

The council distribution program is currently operating across 180 local sites like libraries and council customer service centres, with preparations underway to expand access further throughout next year.

Concession card holders, those aged 70 and over, people with a disability and other higher risk groups can already access free RATs closer to home through participating local councils.

Individuals at high risk of severe illness or those symptomatic and eligible for antivirals who test negative on a RAT should see their primary care provider to access PCR testing, to ensure early detection and effective treatment.

These changes will allow more healthcare workers to return to other healthcare settings where workforce demands are higher.

More than 125 million RATs have been distributed to Victorians this year and more than 22 million PCR tests have been performed since January 2020. There have also been more than 16 million COVID-19 vaccine doses administered in Victoria since February last year.

For testing site locations, and information on the council distribution program, visit [www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/get-a-covid-19-test](http://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/get-a-covid-19-test).

### Quotes attributable to Minister for Health Mary-Anne Thomas

*"We're encouraging Victorians to pick up a free packet of RATs over the Christmas and New Year period to ensure they can enjoy the festive season safely with their loved ones."*

*"There are simple things people can do to enjoy the festivities safely – plan your party outside if you can, stay home if you're sick, wear a mask if you can't physically distance from others and stay up to date with your vaccinations."*

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