

Selecting and using rapid antigen tests

The Government reminded on February 26 that members of the public may browse the COVID-19 thematic website for information on selecting and using rapid antigen tests (RAT) kits via www.coronavirus.gov.hk/rat/eng/rat.html.

Selecting RAT

Currently, a number of RAT kits are available in the market. The Government accepts RAT kits that have been recognised by the relevant authorities of major markets (including Hong Kong, Mainland, Europe and the United States) as set out below:

- Department of Health, Hong Kong: Listed Rapid Antigen Tests for COVID-19 under the Medical Device Administrative Control System;
- National Medical Products Administration: List of approved medical devices for COVID-19 preventive and control uses;
- European Union: Common list of COVID-19 rapid antigen tests; and
- U.S. Food and Drug Administration: List of SARS-CoV-2 antigen diagnostic tests with Emergency Use Authorization.

When buying RAT kits, members of the public may also make reference to the information on the aforementioned website which includes details of RAT kits recently procured by the Government for free distribution to targeted groups (www.coronavirus.gov.hk/rat/eng/kit_comparison.html).

The Public Health Laboratory Services Branch of the Centre of Health Protection (CHP), Department of Health has conducted preliminary evaluation on RAT kits procured by the Government and confirmed that they are effective in detecting the Omicron variant. The evaluation also included RAT kits manufactured prior to the discovery of Omicron variants (i.e. before November 2021). Generally speaking, nucleocapsid (N) protein is less prone to mutation and all the RAT kits procured by the Government target N protein antigen. As such, the impact of the emergence of Omicron variant on RAT's effectiveness is insignificant.

Members of the public may pay attention to the relevant recommendations. Most of the products have the expiry date displayed and members of the public should pay attention before purchasing.

Handling RAT results

The Government announced on February 25 that due to relatively high

infection risk in the community, RAT's positive results are relatively certain. Members of the public tested positive by RAT, whether distributed by the Government or on their own purchase, should be considered positive cases and they should take all necessary steps to avoid further spreading of the virus, including staying at home. If home environment allows, they should stay in their own room and keep the door closed. No one should be allowed to enter the room. If they have to leave the room, they should wear a well-fitted surgical mask properly.

The guidelines on the COVID-19 thematic website will be updated from time to time to provide information most suited to persons tested positive (including those tested positive by RAT) but pending admission (www.coronavirus.gov.hk/eng/pending-admission.html). The CHP is setting up an online registration system for persons tested positive by RAT to self-report. Details will be announced in due course.

A Government spokesperson also reminded members of the public that as RAT has its limitations in terms of sensitivity, a negative result of RAT should not be fully trusted as it may lead to a false sense of security. A single negative RAT result cannot preclude the possibility that the testee has been infected but during the period of incubation, or at an early stage of infection. Members of the public should remain vigilant, maintain all personal protection measures, including wearing masks properly, maintain personal hygiene, and keep social distancing, take all anti-epidemic measures when they go out. Persons with symptoms or high exposure risk should continue to be tested repeatedly within a short period of time and closely monitor their health conditions. The Government will not accept negative RAT result as a negative result required under compulsory testing.