

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

WRITTEN QUESTION

Mr Maley to the Minister for Health:

Howard Springs Rapid COVID clinical testing and PPE

Questions:

- 1. Despite the Health Minister saying the AUSMAT clinical model would survive the hand-over to NT Government, why has rapid antigen testing been stopped at Howard Springs?**

The Office of the Chief Health Officer (CHO) is responsible for advising on and implementing the most appropriate means to protect the health of the population in the NT.

Rapid Antigen Testing (RAT) is not the preferred test for screening of quarantine workers because it is not sensitive enough and carries a greater risk of false negative results.

PCR testing is highly sensitive and specific, and detects the SARS-CoV-2 in the pre-symptomatic phase of infection, which may be several days before it may be detected by a RAT (which detects the virus at higher viral loads).

Salivary PCR testing is more acceptable for repeat testing and, when used daily to complement weekly nasopharyngeal testing, is highly sensitive and is the accepted gold standard for this purpose.

The Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) and Public Health Laboratory Network (PHLN) both recommend this approach.

The CHO has issued a direction and procedure for quarantine workers to be tested using PCR weekly via nasopharyngeal samples and daily using salivary samples.

[cho-directions-nr12-2021-directions-for-quarantine-workers.pdf](#)
[procedure-for-covid-19-testing-of-quarantine-workers-as-authorised-by-the-cho.pdf](#)

- 2. Acting Health CEO Dr Charles Pain says PCR tests can be turned around within an hour when urgent. Is there a guarantee results from all PCR tests will be returned on the same day they are conducted?**

PCR test reporting is prioritised and results can be available within an hour, using a point of care PCR machine. The PCR reporting timeframes for quarantine staff who are adhering to the CHO direction are available within 24 hours.

- 3. If not, what guarantees are there to prevent a staff member at Howard Springs leaving the centre before test results have been provided?**

This question is based on a false premise that the testing regime aims to return a result before the end of the day on which testing occurs. The testing regime (of serial testing with PCR) described above reliably detects the earliest possible rise in the virus before an individual is infectious.

- 4. How much money will halting rapid antigen testing save?**

Not applicable.

- 5. Has there been a change of supplier for face masks at the centre and if so, who now has the contract and why?**

There has been no change of supplier.

- 6. What is the saving from this measure?**

Not applicable.