

Public advisory

Rapid antigen test kits and potential exposure to hazardous substances

Last updated: 2022-02-24

Summary

Product: COVID-19 rapid antigen test kits

Issue: Health products - New safety information

Medical devices - Increased risk or new adverse events

COVID

What to do:

- Keep rapid antigen test kits and solutions out of the reach of children and pets.
- Do not swallow the solutions, and avoid eye and skin contact.
- Wash hands thoroughly after use.
- If spillage occurs, rinse well with water.
- Follow all instructions for proper disposal.
- Report any health product-related **side effects** or **complaints** to Health Canada.
- Contact your local Poison Information Centre in cases of accidental ingestion or direct skin exposure to test kit solutions.

Affected products

COVID-19 rapid antigen test kits

Issue

Following an increase in reports to poison control centres, Health Canada is advising Canadians about potential risks associated with the misuse or accidental ingestion or spillage of COVID-19 rapid antigen test kit solutions on the skin. Health Canada has determined that the kits are safe and effective when used as intended. However, many test kits include liquid solutions with chemical preservatives, such as sodium azide and Proclin that may be poisonous if swallowed or absorbed through the skin, particularly in children and pets. Small doses of sodium azide can lower blood pressure, and larger doses may cause more serious health effects. Proclin is also found in many kits. It contains chemicals that can cause skin and eye irritation, as well as allergic reactions. Accidental ingestion or skin exposure to very small quantities of liquid solutions would not be expected to cause the serious effects associated with larger doses. However, even small quantities may cause effects in small children and pets.

As part of COVID-19 testing initiatives Canadians may receive rapid antigen test kits for self-use from health units, schools, workplaces or other venues that have been authorized by Health Canada for use by laboratories or trained individuals. While these kits are safe, effective, and beneficial for self-testing, the product labelling and instructions may not describe or disclose the risks associated with misuse or accidental ingestion. This advisory is intended to help fill that labelling gap, and warn Canadians about the risks associated with misuse, accidental ingestion or spillage of rapid antigen test kit solutions.

Health Canada is aware of approximately 50 calls made to poison centres in Canada related to accidental exposure, which have resulted in minor health outcomes. Health Canada is advising Canadians on a precautionary basis to help mitigate the risks associated with misuse, accidental ingestion or skin exposure.

What you should do

- Keep rapid antigen test kits and solutions out of the reach of children and pets.
- Do not swallow the solutions, and avoid eye and skin contact.
- Wash hands thoroughly after use.
- If spillage occurs, rinse well with water.
- Follow all instructions for proper disposal.
- Report any health product-related side effects or complaints to Health Canada.
- Contact your local Poison Information Centre in cases of accidental ingestion of chemicals or direct skin exposure.

Additional information

- ▶ Details
- ▶ Media and public enquiries

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