

CORONAVIRUS — RAPID ANTIGEN TESTS

**105. Mr S.N. AUBREY to the Minister for Health:**

I refer to the McGowan Labor government's efforts to keep the Western Australian community safe throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

- (1) Can the minister advise the house how the McGowan Labor government is making rapid antigen tests accessible to all Western Australians, particularly in regional Western Australia?
- (2) Can the minister outline to the house how Western Australia's COVID-19 testing arrangements support Western Australian households?

**Ms A. SANDERSON replied:**

I thank the member for Scarborough for the question.

- (1)–(2) I am very pleased to say that the McGowan government has prepared well for this COVID surge. Part of those preparations involved ensuring a solid supply of rapid antigen tests across our community. RATs are an important part of the testing regime and have been endorsed by the Chief Health Officer as a diagnostic tool.

We saw with Omicron an impact that we had not previously seen with COVID, and that was that impact on furlough, critical supply chains and critical industries. It was not just the health and hospital system that was coming under strain with large numbers of COVID cases. We saw the PCR testing system in the eastern states overwhelmed. People were unable to find RATs in shops. We heard stories of symptomatic people being turned away from PCR testing centres, business groups warned employees that they were unable to return to work without RATs, dairy farmers could not get truck drivers to collect the milk at the farm gate and childcare centres were in crisis.

The cost of RATs can be an issue for WA families and that is why we have now prioritised providing access to 15 RATs to all WA families. No other jurisdiction in Australia has provided free access to RATs for households. About half a million RATs will be handed out at train stations, major events and shopping centres, in both regional and metropolitan areas. An additional 74 000 RATs are being distributed directly to households in remote and regional towns, and regional distribution is being prioritised. Every state member of Parliament will receive 1 000 RATs for constituents in need. New pick-up sites at the Kingsway sporting complex car park will open from today to Thursday, from 7.00 am to 6.45 pm, replacing the Perth Airport site for RATs. There is currently a site in Rockingham from which people can collect RATs. Almost 650 000 families have registered for five free RATs. All those families will automatically be sent the extra 10 RATs. Half of those registered will receive their order by the end of this week. Also, 48 000 RATs will be distributed to Kimberley communities over the weekend.

We are able to offer this Australian-first free RAT program because we ordered over 100 million RATs. We used our time well to prepare our state for the COVID surge. We know that RATs provide comfort and security for members of the community to go about their business, to send their children to school, to go to work and to continue to visit their vulnerable and elderly parents. It is an important tool in our toolbox to manage this surge. All I hear from the opposition is petty opportunistic comments criticising us for transporting RATs via air freight at a time when we had global supply chain issues. If it were up to the opposition, we would be waiting for that supply. We got on the front foot and got those RATs in when we needed them. I am proud to say that we have been proactive in securing those supplies and we are giving them to WA households.