

Health Canada has given the green light to a rapid test for [coronavirus \(https://www.thestar.com/coronavirus.html\)](https://www.thestar.com/coronavirus.html), but experts say people shouldn't expect the testing backlog — and lineups — will disappear anytime soon.

"It's sort of sold as reducing the backlog," Dr. Zain Chagla, an infectious disease specialist with McMaster University, said about the newly approved ID Now test. "I'm uncomfortable with this. I don't think this is going to significantly reduce the backlog by any means.

"It is nice to have another tool to get people tested, but this is probably not the test that's going to change the provincial testing queues altogether."

Ottawa announced Wednesday it approved the test developed by Abbott Laboratories, which can deliver results in less than 15 minutes of a patient being swabbed, without having to first send the sample to a lab for processing.

Neither the company nor the federal government will be more specific about when the test kits will start arriving, other than "the coming weeks."

The approval came a day after the federal government announced it had signed a deal to buy nearly eight million of the tests from the U.S.-based company, pending Health Canada approval, as well as 3,800 of the analyzer machines that process the results.

The ID Now test has been approved and used in the United States since the end of March under an emergency authorization, but not without controversy. Several clinical studies have since raised concerns over its accuracy, though others concluded with more favourable results.

"If you look at some of the literature that has come out around this machine, it does miss some positives," noted Chagla. "From reading the U.S. experiences, people who are still having symptoms after a negative test are recommended to get another test.

"There's limitation with this machine but it's better than nothing at this point."

According to an Abbott spokesperson, the test needs to be administered by a trained health-care provider.

A swab is taken either from the nose or the back of the throat, and then mixed with a chemical solution that can "recognize a unique section of the Coronavirus genome, while ignoring other viruses even if they're similar strains," the spokesperson told the Star in an email.

"ID NOW delivers reliable results in minutes, rather than hours or days, on the frontlines of the COVID-19 pandemic with accuracy rates as high as 94.7% compared to lab-based PCR reference tests in the acute phase of illness."

Dr. Andrew Morris, an infectious disease specialist at Sinai Health and University Health Network, called the approval of the rapid test "welcome" but not a surprise. The test "has been approved in almost every jurisdiction where there's been an application," he said.

The question now is when these tests are going to arrive.

Other countries and the World Health Organization have also purchased them, and it's not clear "where we are in the pecking order," Morris said.

"Inevitably it's going to help us but we really needed it several weeks ago to avoid our backlog," he said.

The province also needs to figure out how the new tests will be used as part of a larger strategy, which should include "surveillance, screening and diagnostic testing."