

COVID-19 Testing FAQs

Answers to many of your coronavirus-related questions



What do I do if I am experiencing COVID-19 symptoms and want to be tested?

Call your local provider. Together you will determine next steps, such as being evaluated and/or being tested. It's important to call ahead to your provider's office.



Should everyone be tested for COVID-19?

Decisions surrounding who should be tested are made by state and local health departments and your provider. Due to limited supplies, testing is typically reserved for those with suspected symptoms, those at high risk for COVID-19 related complications, or in situations with high rates of transmission. Work with your provider to determine if you should be tested.



What if I think I was exposed to someone with COVID-19?

Contact your provider to determine if you should quarantine. Quarantine involves keeping people who have been exposed to the virus away from other people. This helps limit the number of people who might get the virus.



Can I return to work without being tested?

If you have been off work for a COVID-19 related issue, please consult with your healthcare provider to help guide your return to work. Testing is typically unnecessary in this process, though this may change as the situation evolves.



What types of tests are commonly used to identify SARS-COV2 (the virus that causes COVID-19 illness)?

Testing for current infection

- This test is also referred to as a molecular test, RT-PCR, or NAAT.
- This test is performed by swabbing either the nose, back of nose, or throat.

Testing for evidence of previous infection

- This test is also referred to as an antibody test or serology test.
- This test is performed by collecting a blood sample.



MOLECULAR TEST (FOR CURRENT INFECTION)

What do the results of a molecular test mean?

If you receive a **positive** test result, you are most likely infected with the virus.

If you receive a **negative** test result, you may or may not be infected with the virus. However, it is possible to be infected with the virus and have a negative test result. This may happen if the levels of the virus in your system are not high enough to detect.

It is very important to discuss all COVID-19 test results with your provider. You may be instructed to return for additional testing or stay away from other people to avoid infecting them. Your provider will also be able to tell you when it is safe to return to work and be around other people.





ANTIBODY TEST (FOR PREVIOUS INFECTION)

How does this test work?

A blood sample is collected and reviewed in a lab, looking for antibodies to SARS-COV2. After you have been exposed to an infection, your body will make antibodies. It can take 1-3 weeks after infection for the antibodies to show up in your blood.



What do the results mean?

If you receive a **positive** test result, it means that you have been exposed to a virus which caused your body to develop antibodies. These antibodies may or may not have been caused by exposure to SARS-COV2. If you receive a **negative** test result, it means that the test does not detect antibodies to a virus in your blood. This may mean that you have not been exposed to SARS-COV2. However, it may also mean that the antibodies were not detected in your blood at the time of the test being performed.



If I have antibodies to SARS-COV2 am I protected from getting infected? For how long?

It is not yet known if having antibodies can protect someone from getting infected with the virus again, or how long that protection might last.

It is very important to discuss all test results related to COVID-19 with your provider. You may be instructed to return for additional testing or stay away from other people to avoid infecting them. Your provider will also be able to tell you when it is safe to return to work and be around other people.



What is contact tracing?

Contact tracing involves working with a patient who is diagnosed with the virus to help them recall everyone they have had close contact with during the timeframe when they may have been infected. Those exposed individuals are then notified of their potential exposure and provided with education, information, and support. They may be asked to quarantine, maintain social distance with mask use, or some other preventative actions until 14 days after the exposure, in case they become ill.

Always contact your provider if you are experiencing symptoms or believe you were exposed to someone who has tested positive for COVID-19. All individuals should continue to be vigilant to protect themselves and others from contracting and spreading COVID-19, even if you have a negative or normal test result.

Keep in mind, COVID-19 is new and therefore what is known about this virus is constantly changing. This information is based on current knowledge about the virus, but as more data becomes available it may not reflect the most up-to-date information.

Additional Antibody Testing Information

You may be thinking about getting the COVID-19 antibody test, hoping it will help you learn if you have had COVID-19. The most common reason we are asked about this test is to check for immunity to COVID-19. However, given the current inaccuracy of the test and the limited knowledge we have of the protective benefits of the antibodies, your result may not offer the information you hoped for. This creates a lot of questions about what this test can tell you. This is a summary meant to help you understand what is known and what is not known about the antibody test for the novel coronavirus as of today.

- Antibodies are an indicator of a prior infection with a specific organism.
- There are new blood tests which test for the presence of antibodies to the novel coronavirus (SARS-COV2).
- These tests may be useful for public health experts to determine how widespread a disease is in the population (prevalence). In this case, the test may tell us the overall prevalence of COVID-19 in the U.S. population and may also help determine the prevalence of asymptomatic infections (infections without symptoms).

Limitations of Antibody Testing for the Novel Coronavirus

Although useful for studies of populations, a positive antibody test result for SARS-COV2 comes with real uncertainty for you as an individual.

Current tests have unknown accuracy

- The antibody tests have not been approved by the FDA. Many of these tests have received only Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) status from the FDA. This means the manufacturer's data has been reviewed by the FDA but not yet independently verified by the FDA.
- None of these antibody tests are perfectly accurate which creates uncertainty even if the test result is positive. If you test positive, there is a chance that you truly do *not* have any antibodies to SARS-COV2. This is called a false positive result.

Even with a test known to have perfect accuracy, a positive test result does not equal immunity to this disease, and if it does happen to, we do not know the duration of that protection.

- One might believe a positive antibody test result for SARS-COV2 means you are immune to the virus.

However, the CDC and WHO have cautioned against making that presumption. Remember this is a new virus the world has never experienced.

- We know with viruses similar to SARS-COV2, immunity does not last a lifetime but rather lasts only a few months to a couple of years. Immunity (antibodies) likely will fall over time. This would make you susceptible to the disease again, possibly before a vaccine is available.

In summary, there are some key facts to remember about antibody testing:

- If you test negative, then we know with near certainty that you do not have antibodies to SARS-COV2.
- If you test positive, you still need to proceed with caution because:
 - No current tests are 100% accurate for identifying positive results.
 - We do not know at this time if someone who has antibodies will be immune to the virus, and if so, how long they will remain immune.



So, despite all these problems with the test and the fact that the test is not free, why might it be a reasonable idea to have this test performed?

- If asked to do so as part of a study to understand how common the virus has been in a population or community. This can help public health experts determine how widespread a disease has been in a population. When asked to do so as part of a study, you would not be expected to pay for the test.
- If you are interested in donating plasma to patients who are seriously ill and hospitalized for COVID-19. The use of these antibodies present in donor plasma is a promising treatment that has been used in some critical cases.
- Although the test has flaws, during times of severe anxiety associated with the unknowns of this virus, some may find comfort in knowing as much information as possible.

Please remember that your test results, like all protected health information, are always confidential. They will only be shared with you; unless you authorize the sharing of the results.

If you would like more information or have any further questions about antibody testing or SARS-COV2, please reach out to your clinic for a virtual, phone, or in person appointment.

