



COVID-19

COVID-19 Testing Overview

Updated Oct. 21, 2021

[Print](#)

[Find out who should get tested](#). Protect yourself and others. Wear a mask, stay at least 6 feet from others, avoid crowds and poorly ventilated indoor spaces, and wash your hands often.

Types of tests

COVID-19 tests are available that can test for [current infection](#) or [past infection](#).

- A [viral test](#) tells you if you have a current infection. Two types of viral tests can be used: nucleic acid amplification tests (NAATs) and antigen tests.
- An [antibody test](#) (also known as a serology test) might tell you if you had a past infection. Antibody tests should not be used to diagnose a current infection.



Coronavirus Self-Checker

A tool to help you make decisions on when to seek testing and medical care.

[Get Started](#)

[About the Tool](#)

Who should get tested for current infection

- People who have [symptoms](#) of COVID-19.
- Most people who have had [close contact](#) (within 6 feet for a total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period) with someone with confirmed COVID-19.
 - Fully vaccinated people should be tested 5-7 days following a known exposure to someone with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 and wear a mask in public indoor settings for 14 days or until they receive a negative test result.
 - People who have tested positive for COVID-19 within the past 3 months and recovered do not need to get tested following an exposure as long as they do not develop new symptoms.
- Unvaccinated people who have taken part in activities that put them at higher risk for COVID-19 because they cannot physically distance as needed to avoid [exposure](#), such as travel, attending large social or mass gatherings, or being in crowded or poorly-ventilated indoor settings.
- People who have been asked or referred to get [tested](#) by their healthcare provider, or [state](#), [tribal](#), [local](#) [link icon](#), or [territorial health department](#).

CDC recommends that anyone with any signs or [symptoms of COVID-19](#) get tested, regardless of vaccination status or prior infection. If you get tested because you have symptoms or were potentially exposed to the virus, you should stay away from others pending test results and follow the advice of your health care provider or a public health professional.

When you are fully vaccinated and traveling internationally

International travelers need to pay close attention to the situation at their international destinations before traveling due to the spread of new variants and because the burden of COVID-19 varies globally.

- Fully vaccinated travelers do not need to get tested before leaving the United States unless required by their destination.
- Fully vaccinated air travelers coming to the United States from abroad, including U.S. citizens, are still [required](#) to have a negative SARS-CoV-2 viral test result or documentation of recovery from COVID-19 before they board a flight to the United States.
- International travelers arriving in the United States are still recommended to get a SARS-CoV-2 viral test 3-5 days after travel regardless of vaccination status.
- Fully vaccinated travelers do not need to self-quarantine in the United States following international travel.
- For more information, see [International Travel During COVID-19](#).

How to get tested for current COVID-19 infection

- Contact your healthcare provider or visit your [state, tribal, local](#) [link](#), and territorial [health department's website](#) to find the latest local information on testing. The type of viral COVID-19 tests offered may differ by location.

You and your healthcare provider might also consider either an [at-home collection kit](#) or an [at-home test](#) if you have signs and symptoms of COVID-19 and if you can't get tested by a healthcare provider or public health official.

How to use results of viral tests


- If you test positive, know what protective steps to take to [prevent others from getting sick](#).
- If you test negative, you probably were not infected at the time your sample was collected. The test result only means that you did not have COVID-19 at the time of testing. Continue to take steps to [protect yourself](#).



Find out what steps you can take to prevent the spread of COVID-19

Print Resources

HOW TO COLLECT YOUR ANTERIOR NASAL SWAB SAMPLE FOR COVID-19 TESTING



Follow the instructions included with your sample kit. Use **only** materials provided in your kit to collect and store your sample, unless the kit says to do otherwise. Use **only** an approved sampling kit given to you by your healthcare provider or by personnel at the testing center.

Initial set-up

1. Open the sampling kit.
2. Apply hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.


Sample collection

3. Remove the swab from the container, being careful not to touch the soft end with your hand.
4. Insert the swab into your nostril. Do not insert it more than half an inch into your nostril.
5. Slowly twist the swab, rubbing it along the insides of your nostril for 15 seconds.

How to Collect An Anterior Nasal Swab Specimen for COVID-19 Testing

English [\[371KB, 2 Pages\]](#)
Español [\[371KB, 2 Pages\]](#)

HOW TO COLLECT A NASAL MID-TURBINATE SPECIMEN FOR COVID-19 TESTING



Use **only** an authorized specimen collection kit. Get a kit from your healthcare provider or a testing center. Kits are available at a pharmacy or other retail outlet. Follow the instructions included with the specimen collection kit. Use **only** materials provided in the kit to collect and store or mail the specimen unless the kit says to do otherwise. Use these instructions with kits that specify a nasal mid-turbinate swab collection.

Setup

1. Disinfect the surface where you will open the collection kit. Remove and lay out contents of kit. Read instructions before starting specimen collection.
2. Wash hands with soap and water. If soap and water are not available, use hand sanitizer.

Specimen Collection

3. Remove the swab from the package. Do not touch the soft end with your hands or anything else.
4. Insert the entire soft end of the swab straight back into your nostril **less than one inch** (about 2cm) or until resistance is felt.
5. Slowly rotate the swab, gently rubbing it along the insides of your nasal passage several times.
6. Gently remove the swab.
7. Using the same swab, repeat steps 4-6 in your other nostril with the same end of the swab.

How to Collect a Nasal Mid-Turbinate Swab Sample for COVID-19 Testing

English [\[3.51MB, 2 Pages\]](#)
Español [\[3.51MB, 2 Pages\]](#)

What Your Test Results Mean

Accessible version available at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/testing/diagnostic-testing.html>

If you test positive for COVID-19

TAKE STEPS TO HELP PREVENT THE SPREAD OF COVID-19

3 Key Steps to Take While Waiting for Your COVID-19 Test Result

To help stop the spread of COVID-19, take these **3 key steps NOW** while waiting for your test results:

- 1 Stay home and monitor your health.**



STAY HOME.
Do not leave your home, except to get medical care. Do not visit public areas.



STAY IN TOUCH WITH YOUR DOCTOR.



GET REST AND STAY HYDRATED.
Take over-the-counter medicines, such as acetaminophen, to help you feel better.



SEPARATE YOURSELF FROM OTHER PEOPLE.
As much as possible, stay in a specific room and away from other people and pets in your home.

What Your Test Results Mean

English  [216kb, 1 page]

Español  [208kb, 1 page]

■ Stay home and monitor your health to help protect your friends, family, and others from possibly getting COVID-19 from you.

Stay home and away from others:

- If possible, stay away from others, especially people who are at higher risk for getting very sick from COVID-19, such as older adults and people with other medical conditions.
- If you have been in [contact](#) with someone with COVID-19, stay home and away from others for 14 days after your last [contact](#) with that person.



Monitor your health:

- Watch for fever, cough, shortness of breath, or other symptoms of COVID-19. Remember, symptoms may appear 2-14 days after exposure to COVID-19 and can include:

- Fever or chills
- Cough
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- New loss of taste or smell
- Sore throat



3 key steps to take while waiting for your COVID-19 test results

English  [229KB, 2 Pages]

Español  [232KB, 2 Pages]

Last Updated Oct. 21, 2021