



## COVID-19

# Self-Testing

Updated Dec. 6, 2021

## Summary of Recent Changes

Updates as of December 6, 2021



- Added information on when and why to use a self-test. Self-testing is one of several risk-reduction strategies to reduce the chances of COVID-19 transmission. They may be used regardless of vaccination or symptom status.

[Previous updates](#)

## Key Points

- COVID-19 self-tests (also referred to as home tests or over-the-counter (OTC) tests) are one of many risk-reduction measures, along with [vaccination](#), [masking](#), and physical distancing, that [protect you and others](#) by reducing the chances of spreading SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19.
- Self-tests can be taken at home or anywhere, are easy to use, and produce rapid results.
- You can use self-tests, regardless of vaccination status, or whether or not you have symptoms.
- Follow all of the manufacturer's instructions for performing the test.
- [If you test positive](#), you should [isolate](#) and inform your healthcare provider, as well as any [close contacts](#).
- Consider using a self-test before joining indoor gatherings with others who are not in your household.
- A positive self-test result means that the test detected the virus, and you are very likely to have an infection and should stay home or isolate for 10 days, wear a mask if you could have contact with others, and avoid indoor gatherings to reduce the risk of spreading disease to someone else.
- A negative self-test result means that the test did not detect the virus and you may not have an infection, but it does not rule out infection. Repeating the test within a few days, with at least 24 hours between tests, will increase the confidence that you are not infected.



### COVID-19 Viral Testing Tool

A tool to help you understand COVID-19 testing options.

## Video Resources

[How To Use a Self Test](#)

[How To Interpret Self Test Results](#)

## Overview

Note: If your COVID-19 test is positive, tell a healthcare provider about your positive result and stay in contact with them during your illness. To avoid spreading the virus to others, follow CDC's [guidance for isolation](#). Tell your [close contacts](#) that they have been exposed to the virus that causes COVID-19.

Testing is critically important to help reduce the spread of the virus that causes COVID-19. If you have symptoms or had a known exposure to someone with suspected or confirmed COVID-19, you should be tested, regardless of your vaccination status. You may also consider self-testing to screen for COVID-19 immediately before an activity to see if you are positive for COVID-19. You should [isolate](#) if you test positive.

If you need to be tested for COVID-19, consider using a **self-test** that can be performed at home or anywhere else. Sometimes a self-test is also called a “home test”, an “at-home test”, or an “over-the-counter (OTC) test.” Visit [FDA's website](#) [↗](#) for a list of authorized tests. Some self-tests may have age limitations.

Self-testing offers fast results. Self-tests are one of several options for testing for the virus that causes COVID-19 and may be more convenient than laboratory-based tests and point-of-care tests. Consider keeping self-tests at home or where you may need them.

Self-tests can also be used as one of many risk-reduction measures, along with vaccination, masking, and physical distancing, that [protect you and others](#) by reducing the chance of viral transmission. You can self-test, even if you don't have symptoms or are fully vaccinated, in order to make decisions that will help prevent spreading COVID-19 to others.

Self-tests can be purchased online or in pharmacies and retail stores. They are also available for free through some [local health departments](#) [↗](#) or Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHC). As of November 2021, self-tests are available to detect [current infection](#). Self-tests are not available to detect antibodies to the virus that causes COVID-19.

## When to Consider Self-Testing

Self-tests may be used if you have COVID-19 symptoms or have been exposed or potentially exposed to an individual with COVID-19.

Even if you don't have symptoms and have not been exposed to an individual with COVID-19, using a self-test before gathering indoors with others can give you information about the risk of spreading the virus that causes COVID-19. This is especially important before gathering with [unvaccinated children](#), [older individuals](#), those who are [immunocompromised](#), or [individuals at risk of severe disease](#).

A positive test result indicates that you likely have a current infection, and you should [isolate](#) and inform [close contacts](#).

A negative test result indicates that you may not be infected and may be at low risk of spreading disease to others, though it does not rule out an infection. Repeating the test will increase the confidence that you are not infected. Performing serial



tests, meaning two or more tests over several days with at least 24 hours between tests—with one test as close as possible to the event you will attend—improves the reliability of testing and reduces your risk of transmitting disease to others even further. Some self-tests require this type of repeat testing in the manufacturer’s instructions.

## How to Use a Self-Test

Read the complete manufacturer’s instructions for use before using the test. Talk to a healthcare provider if you have questions about the test or your results. Refer to CDC’s videos on [How to Use a Self-Test](#) and [How to Interpret Self-Test Results](#).

## Prepare to Collect a Specimen

- Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- Open the box and follow the instructions included with the self-test to collect your own nasal or saliva specimen.
- If you don’t collect the specimens as directed, your test results may be incorrect.

## Perform the Test

Follow the instructions exactly and perform the steps in the order that they are listed. The manufacturer may also provide other resources, such as quick reference guides or instructional videos, to help you perform the test correctly.

Most self-tests require the collection of a **nasal specimen** (see the [Additional Print Resources](#) section below). A few self-tests require a **saliva specimen**.

Once collected, use the specimen as described in the instructions to complete the self-test.

## Tips

- Store all test components according to the manufacturer’s instructions until ready for use.
- Check the expiration date. Do not use expired tests or test components that are damaged or appear discolored based on the manufacturer’s instructions.
- [Clean](#) the countertop, table, or other surfaces where you will do the test.
- Do not open test devices or other test components until you are ready to start the testing process.
- Have a timer ready because you may need to time several of the test steps.
- Read test results only within the amount of time specified in the manufacturer’s instructions. A result read before or after the specified timeframe may be incorrect.
- Don’t reuse test devices or other components.

After you have the results, discard the specimen collection swab or tube and test in the trash, [clean all surfaces](#) that the specimen may have touched, and wash your hands.

## If Your Test Result Is Positive

You should stay home or isolate for 10 days and wear a mask if others could have contact with you. Also, tell a healthcare provider about your positive test result and stay in contact with them. If your illness becomes severe, seek medical attention. If you have an [emergency warning sign](#) (including trouble breathing), seek emergency medical care immediately. To avoid spreading the virus to others, follow [CDC recommendations](#).

**Tell your [close contacts](#)** that they may have been exposed to the virus that causes COVID-19. A person with COVID-19 can begin spreading it starting 48 hours (or 2 days) before the person has any symptoms or tests positive. By informing your close contacts they may have been exposed, you are helping to protect everyone.

If you think your positive test result may be incorrect, contact a healthcare provider to determine whether or not additional testing is necessary.

# If Your Test Result Is Negative

A negative test result means the virus that causes COVID-19 was not found in your specimen, and you may have a lower risk of transmitting the disease to others. If you took the test while you had symptoms and followed all instructions carefully, a negative result means your current illness is probably not COVID-19, though it does not rule out a COVID-19 infection.

However, it is possible for a test to give a negative result in some people who have COVID-19. This is called a false negative. You could also test negative if the specimen was collected too early in your infection. In this case, you could test positive later during your illness.

## Serial Testing (Repeat Testing)

Some self-tests are designed to be used in a series. Serial self-testing is when a person tests themselves multiple times for COVID-19, or on a routine basis, such as every few days. By testing more frequently, you might detect the virus that causes COVID-19 more quickly and could reduce the spread of infection. Some self-tests include instructions for performing serial testing, including the number of days between tests, and may include more than one test in the package.

If your self-test is negative, you should follow the manufacturer's instructions for use for serial testing, if applicable, that are included in the test box, or you can find the instructions for your test ([molecular](#) or [antigen](#)) on the FDA website. They may recommend you test again within 2 or 3 days. Contact a healthcare provider if you have any questions about your test results or serial testing. You may also use the [COVID-19 Viral Testing Tool](#) to help you determine the next steps after testing. If you have [COVID-19 symptoms](#), especially if you have been exposed to someone who has COVID-19, you should [quarantine according to CDC recommendations](#).

If you think your negative test result may be incorrect, contact a healthcare provider to determine whether or not additional testing is necessary.


## If Your Result Shows Invalid or Error

Sometimes invalid results or an error can show on the test device. Invalid results or an error can occur for many reasons. Your specimen may not have been collected correctly, or the test may have malfunctioned.

Invalid test results are rare but can occur. If the self-test shows an invalid result or a test error, the test did not work properly. If this happens, refer to the instructions for use in the package insert and contact the manufacturer for assistance.

### Additional Print Resources

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



Use **only** an authorized specimen collection kit given to you by your healthcare provider or personnel at the testing center, or purchased over the counter in a pharmacy or other store. Follow the instructions included with the specimen collection kit which may be used on-site or at home. Use **only** materials provided in the kit to collect and store or mail the specimen, unless the kit says to do otherwise. These instructions can also be used with self-testing kits if the kit specifies anterior nasal swab collection.

**Set-up**

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 into your nostril **no more than 1/4 of an inch** (1.5 cm) into your nose.
5. Slowly rotate the swab, gently pressing against the inside of your nostril at least 4 times for a total of 15 seconds. Get as much nasal discharge as possible on the soft end of the swab.
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.

[cdc.gov/coronavirus](https://cdc.gov/coronavirus)

#### How to Collect a Nasal Mid-Turbinate Swab 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 you feel resistance.
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.

[cdc.gov/coronavirus](https://cdc.gov/coronavirus)

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

English  [372 KB, 2 pages]

Español  [205 KB, 2 pages]

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

English  [4 MB, 2 pages]

Español  [4 MB, 2 pages]



# Previous Updates

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## Updates from Previous Content

### As of November 4, 2021

- Self-testing videos are now available to assist with how to use and interpret self-tests.
- Removed recommendation to report test results to healthcare providers or health departments.
- Added guidance about seeking assistance from a healthcare provider if the test result seems incorrect.

### As of October 21, 2021

- Based on evolving evidence, CDC recommends fully vaccinated people get tested 5-7 days after close contact with a person with suspected or confirmed COVID-19.

### As of August 2, 2021

- Added a recommendation for fully vaccinated people who have a known exposure to someone with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 to be tested 3–5 days after exposure, and to wear a mask in public indoor settings for 14 days or until they receive a negative test result.
- Added language about quarantining for fully vaccinated and unvaccinated people.

### As of July 21, 2021

- Added language about people with symptoms of COVID-19 being tested regardless of vaccination status.
- Expanded language on what to do if your self-test result is negative.
- Included a link to the new COVID-19 Viral Testing Tool.