COVID-19

We have the tools to **Fight Omicron**

Vaccines & Booster Masks Testing

Self-Testing

Updated Feb. 1, 2022

CDC has updated isolation and quarantine recommendations for the public, and is revising the CDC website to reflect these changes. These recommendations do not apply to healthcare personnel and do not supersede state, local, tribal, or territorial laws, rules, and regulations.

Free At-Home COVID-19 Tests: Order 4 free tests now so you have them when you need them. ↗

Note: If your COVID-19 self-test is positive, tell a healthcare provider about your positive result and stay in contact with them during your illness. It is particularly important to seek medical care and possible treatment if you have an underlying medical condition that increases your risks from COVID-19. 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. If your symptoms worsen, tell your healthcare provider, or if you have emergency warning signs, seek emergency care immediately.

Summary of Recent Changes

Updates as of January 28, 2021 ⌃

- Added information about when to test
- Added information about ordering test at COVIDtests.gov
- Added information about emergency warning signs
- Added information about treatment after testing

Previous updates

What You Need to Know

- Testing is critically important to help reduce the spread of COVID-19.

- COVID-19 self-tests can be taken at home or anywhere, are easy to use, and produce rapid results.

- Self-tests (also referred to as at-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 COVID-19.

- Free self-tests can be ordered at COVIDtests.gov.

- You can use COVID-19 self-tests regardless of vaccination status or whether or not you have symptoms.

- Consider using a COVID-19 self-test before joining indoor gatherings with others who are not in your household. This is especially important before gathering with individuals at risk of severe disease, older individuals, those who are immunocompromised, or unvaccinated people, including children who cannot get vaccinated yet.

- To obtain accurate results, follow all of the manufacturer's instructions for performing the self-test.

- If you test positive, you should isolate and wear a well-fitting mask if you must be around others, inform your healthcare provider, and inform any close contacts. If you are a healthcare provider, follow CDC guidance for healthcare providers.

- A negative self-test result means that the test did not detect the virus that causes but it does not rule out a COVID-19 infection. A single negative self-test result may not reliable, especially if you have symptoms associated with COVID-19.

- If your result is negative, repeating the self-test within a few days, with at least 24 hours between tests, will increase the confidence that you are not infected with the virus causing COVID-19.

What is a Self–Test

Self-tests for COVID-19 are those that can be performed on yourself at home or anywhere. Sometimes a self-test is also called a "home test," an "at-home test," or an "over-the-counter (OTC) test." 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.

Visit FDA's website ⧉ for a list of authorized tests. Some self-tests may have age limitations for self-collection or collection by an adult for a child.

As of January 2022, self-tests are used to detect current infection. No self-tests are available to detect antibodies to the virus, which would suggest previous infection.

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 up to date with COVID-19 vaccines, in order to make decisions that will help prevent spreading COVID-19 to others.

When to Consider Self–Testing

Self-tests may be used if you have COVID-19 symptoms or have been in close contact or potentially in close contact with an individual with COVID-19.

Even if you don't have symptoms and have not been in close contact with an individual with COVID-19, using a self-test before gathering indoors with others can give you information about the risk of spreading COVID-19. This is especially important before gathering with individuals at risk of severe disease, older individuals, those who are immunocompromised, or unvaccinated people, including children who cannot get vaccinated yet.

Specifically, the best timing when using a self-test is:

- If you have COVID-19 symptoms, use a self-test immediately

- If you were a close contact of someone with COVID-19, self-test after at least 5 days, plus a second test in 1 or 2 days if your first test is negative (See Serial Testing, below)

- If you are testing before a gathering, test immediately before the gathering (or as close in time to the event as possible)

How to Get a Self-Test

Self-tests can be purchased online or in pharmacies and retail stores. Private health insurance will reimburse the cost of purchasing self-tests.

Self-tests can be purchased online or in pharmacies and retail stores. They are also available at no cost through some local health departments, Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHC), or by ordering at COVIDtests.gov ⧉ .

For a list of authorized self-tests, see FDA EUA Tests ⧉ . Some tests may have age limitations for self-collection or collection by an adult for a child.

If you are unable to obtain a self-test, but have symptoms of COVID-19 or have been exposed, stay away from others as much as possible and follow CDC recommendations for What to Do If You Are Sick. You may also consider visiting a community testing site. Call your local health department for additional testing options.

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.

> ▶ **Watch Video:** How to use a self test [00:01:32] ⧉

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 COVID-19 self-test to collect your own nasal specimen.
- If you do not collect the specimens as directed, your test results may be incorrect.

Collect a Specimen and Perform the Self-Test

Follow the manufacturer's 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 COVID-19 self-tests require the collection of a **nasal specimen** (see the Additional Print Resources section below).

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

Self-Testing Print Resources
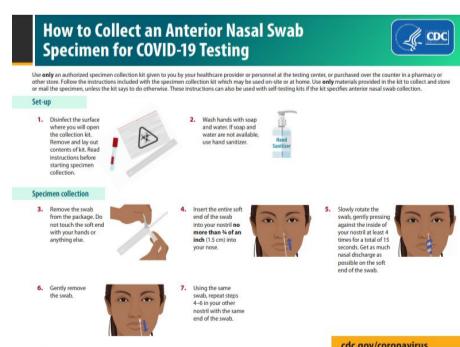
How to Collect An Anterior Nasal Swab Specimen
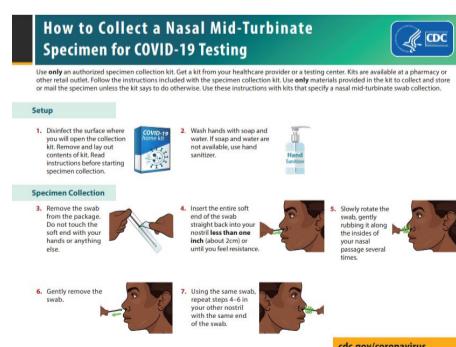
How to Collect a Nasal Mid-Turbinate Swab

for COVID-19 Testing

English [pdf icon]

[372 KB, 2 pages]

Español [pdf icon]

[395 KB, 2 pages]

Specimen for COVID-19 Testing

English [pdf icon]

[4 MB, 2 pages]

Español [pdf icon]

[4 MB, 2 pages]

Using Your Self-Test

English [pdf icon]

[295 KB, 1 page]

Using Your Self-Test - customizable

English [pdf icon]

[272 KB, 1 page]

Chinese [pdf icon]

[338 KB,1page]

French [pdf icon]

[319 KB,1page]

Korean [pdf icon]

[334 KB,1page]

Spanish [pdf icon]

[368 KB,1page]

Vietnamese [pdf icon]

[323 KB,1page]

Tips

- Store all test components according to the manufacturer's instructions until ready for use. See information on the FDA's website [external link] regarding the use of tests shipped or left outside in freezing temperatures.
- Check the expiration date. Do not use expired tests or test components that are damaged or appear discolored based on the manufacturer's instructions.
- Do not open test devices or other test components until you are ready to start the testing process.
- Have a timer ready because you will 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.
- Do not reuse test devices or other components.

After you have the results, discard the specimen collection swab or tube and test in the trash and wash your hands.

Self–Test Results

[play icon] **Watch Video:** How to interpret self-test results [00:01:32]

If Your Test Result Is Positive

You should isolate according to CDC recommendations and wear a well-fitting mask if you must be around other people. Report your positive result to your healthcare provider. It is particularly important to seek medical care and possible treatment if you have an underlying medical condition that increases your risks from COVID-19. 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 the virus starting 48 hours (or 2 days) before they have any symptoms or test positive. By informing your close contacts that 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 additional testing is necessary.

If Your Test Result Is Negative

A negative test result means that the virus that causes COVID-19 was not detected 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 may not be COVID-19, though it does not rule out COVID-19 infection.

It is also 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. You should consider serial testing (see below).

Even if you receive a negative result, you should continue to practice preventative measures, such as being up to date on your COVID-19 vaccination, wearing a mask indoors, and physical distancing to reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19.

If Your Result Shows Invalid or Error

Sometimes invalid results or an error can occur on the self-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, a new test is needed to get an accurate result. Refer to the manufacturer's instructions in the package insert and contact the manufacturer for assistance, consider taking another self-test, or contact a healthcare provider for additional help.

Serial Testing (Repeat Testing)

Serial testing is when a person tests multiple times for COVID-19, or on a routine basis, such as every few days. Some self-tests are designed to be used in a series. By testing more frequently, you may be able to detect 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 serial testing, if applicable. Manufacturer's instructions are included in the test box and are also available on the FDA website ☐ . The instructions 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 think your negative test result may be incorrect, contact a healthcare provider to determine whether additional testing is necessary.

Previous Updates

Updates from Previous Content	⌄

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. Self-tests may be used regardless of vaccination or symptom status.

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.

Last Updated Feb. 1, 2022