COVID-19

Self-Testing At Home or Anywhere

For doing rapid COVID-19 tests anywhere

Updated Mar. 9, 2022

What is a Self-Test or At-Home Test?

Self-tests for COVID-19 give rapid results and **can be taken anywhere**, regardless of your vaccination status or whether or not you have symptoms.

- They detect **current** infection and are sometimes also called "home tests," "at-home tests," or "over-the-counter (OTC) tests."
- They give your **result in a few minutes** and are different from laboratory-based tests that may take days to return your result.
- Self-tests along with vaccination, wearing a well-fitted mask, and physical distancing, help protect you and others by reducing the chances of spreading COVID-19.
- Self-tests **do not** detect antibodies which would suggest a previous infection and they do not measure your level of immunity.

When To Take an At-Home COVID-19 Test

Test Yourself If...	Timing
You have any COVID-19 symptoms	Immediately
You were exposed to someone with COVID-19	At least 5 days after your exposure **If you test negative** for COVID-19, consider testing again 1 to 2 days after your first test
You are going to an indoor event or a gathering	Immediately before the gathering, or as close to the time of the event as possible **This is especially important before gathering with** individuals at risk of severe disease, older adults, those who are immunocompromised, or people who are not up to date on their COVID-19 vaccines, including children who cannot get vaccinated yet.

» Learn what to do if you test positive or test negative.

▷ **Watch Video:** When to use a self-test – ASL [00:02:32]

How to Get an At-Home COVID-19 Test

- **Order free tests** at COVIDtests.gov ☐ . Free tests are also available through local health departments.
- **Buy tests** online or in pharmacies and retail stores. Private health insurance may reimburse the cost of purchasing self-tests. Visit FDA's website ☐ for a list of authorized tests.
- If you're not able to obtain a self-test when you need it, you might also **visit a community testing site, or call your local health department** for more options.

[Go to COVIDtests.gov] [FDA-Authorized Tests]

How to Use an At-Home COVID-19 Test

Read the complete manufacturer's instructions for use before using the test.

- To use an at-home test, you will collect a nasal specimen and then test that specimen.
- If you do not follow the manufacturer's instructions, your test result may be incorrect.
- Wash your hands before and after you collect a nasal specimen for your test.

▷ **Watch Video:** How to use a self-test [00:01:32]

▷ **Watch Video:** How to use a self-test – ASL [00:03:25]

Need More Information? Find videos of manufacturer instructions for your specific self-test.

What Your Test Results Mean

IF YOUR TEST IS
Positive

- The test detected the virus and **you have an infection**.
- Stay home for at least 5 days and isolate from others in your home.
- Tell your close contacts.
- Wear a well-fitted mask when around others. If available, a N95 or KN95 respirator is recommended.
- Watch for symptoms. If you have any emergency warning signs, seek emergency care immediately.
- Tell your healthcare provider. Contact them as soon as possible if:
  - Your symptoms get worse.
  - You are more likely to get very sick because you are an older adult or have an underlying medical condition. Possible treatment may be available for you.
  - You have questions about your isolation.

IF YOUR TEST IS
Negative

Negative

- The test did not detect the virus, **but doesn't rule out an infection.**
- Some self-tests are designed to be used in a series (also known as serial testing). Consider repeating the test 24 to 48 hours later. Multiple negative tests increases the confidence that you are not infected with the virus that causes COVID-19.

If you think your test result may be incorrect, contact the test manufacturer for assistance, consider taking another at-home test, or contact a healthcare provider for help.

▶ **Watch Video:** How to interpret self-test results [00:02:45]

▶ **Watch Video:** How to interpret self-test positive results - ASL [00:02:37]

▶ **Watch Video:** How to interpret self-test negative results - ASL [00:03:00]

Related Questions

How can I get a free COVID-19 test?   ⌃

Self-tests can be ordered online at COVIDtests.gov ↗ . Placing an order only requires your name and residential address. You may also share your email address to get updates on your order. No ID, credit card, or health insurance information is required.

If you have difficulty accessing the internet or need additional support placing an order, you can call 1-800-232-0233 (TTY 1-888-720-7489) 8am to midnight ET, 7 days a week. Help is available in English, Spanish, and more than 150 other languages.

The Disability Information and Access Line ↗ (DIAL) is also available to specifically help people with disabilities place their orders. To get help, call 1-888-677-1199, Monday-Friday from 9AM to 8PM ET, or email DIAL@usaginganddisability.org

For those who have questions about eligibility to receive free tests, the online ordering form, shipping, or delivery, you can contact the USPS Help Desk at 1-800-ASK-USPS (1-800-275-8777).

Self-tests can also be purchased online or in pharmacies and retail stores and may be reimbursed through your health insurance. They are also available at no cost through some local health departments and Community Health Centers.

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.

Should I trust the results of a self-test?   ⌃

Positive results from self-tests are highly reliable.

Negative results from self-tests do not rule out SARS-CoV-2 infection. A negative self-test result may not be reliable, especially if you have symptoms associated with COVID-19.

Invalid results from self-tests mean the test did not work properly, and a new test is needed to get an accurate result.
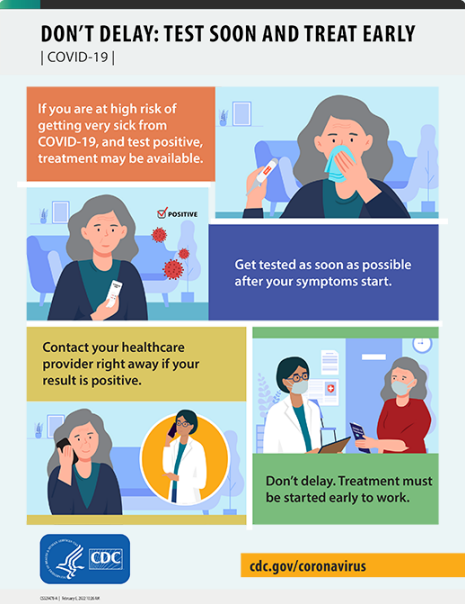
Do I need to report the results from my self-test?   ⌃

CDC strongly encourages everyone who uses a self-test to report any positive results to their healthcare provider. Healthcare providers can ensure that those who have tested positive for COVID-19 receive the most appropriate medical care, including specific treatments if necessary.

In most jurisdictions, healthcare providers who diagnose COVID-19 are required to report those cases to public health.

The US Government does not want to construct any barriers that would deter the use of self-tests. COVID-19 surveillance continues to be based on results from laboratory testing. The primary role of case reporting is to allow public health agencies to take actions to mitigate disease spread. The public health community, including CDC, is confident that situational awareness remains strong without receiving self-test results.
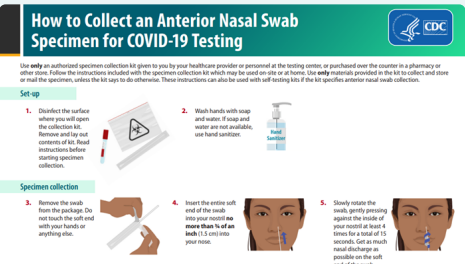
Print Resources

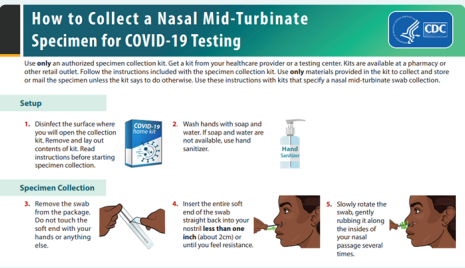**PRINTOUT**
Don't Delay: Test Soon and Treat Early

- English [262 KB, 1 page]
- Spanish [262 KB, 1 page]

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

- English [372 KB, 2 pages]
- Spanish [395 KB, 2 pages]

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

- English [4 MB, 2 pages]
- Spanish [4 MB, 2 pages]

Additional Print Resources

Helpful Links

COVIDtests.gov ↗

FDA-Authorized At-Home Tests ↗

Symptoms of COVID-19

Underlying Medical Conditions

Talking to Close Contacts

Quarantine and Isolation