



COVID-19

Test for Current Infection

Updated May 16, 2022



Free At-Home COVID-19 Tests: [Order 8 free tests now so you have them when you need them.](#) 

Viral Tests Look for Current Infection

- A viral test checks specimens from your nose or your mouth to find out **if you are currently infected** with the virus that causes COVID-19.
- Viral tests **do not** detect antibodies which would suggest a [previous infection](#) and they do not measure your level of immunity.
- Viral tests can be performed in a laboratory, at a testing site, [at home or anywhere else](#).

Learn what to do if you [test positive](#) or [test negative](#).

Viral Test Types

- **Laboratory** and **Rapid Point-of-Care** tests are performed in Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS)-certified facilities to ensure quality of testing.
 - Laboratory tests can take days to complete and include RT-“PCR” tests and other types of nucleic acid amplification tests (NAATs).
 - Rapid Point-of-Care tests can be performed in minutes and can include antigen tests, some NAATs, and [other tests](#).
- **Self-Tests** are rapid tests that can be taken at home or anywhere as long as the instructions are followed.

Learn more about the [types of COVID-19 tests](#).

When to Get Tested

Review the scenarios below to determine when to get tested. If you have had COVID-19 in the past 90 days and recovered, you do not need to be tested unless you develop new symptoms. If you develop new symptoms, [isolate](#) immediately and get tested. Continue to stay home until you know the results. Wear a well-fitted mask around others.

STEP 1 Do you have COVID-19 symptoms?

YES: Get tested immediately. Follow [quarantine guidance](#) while waiting for results.

NO: See Step 2.

STEP 2 Have you had close contact exposure to someone with COVID-19?

YES: Get tested at least 5 days after exposure. Follow [quarantine guidance](#) while waiting to test.

NO: See Step 3.

STEP 3 Do you need to test for ...

Travel?

Outside of United States:

- [All travelers](#): Follow destination requirements.
- All travelers: Consider getting tested as close to the time of departure as possible (no more than 3 days) before your trip.

To the United States:

- [Air passengers \(2 years or older\)](#): Before boarding a flight to the United States, you **must** show a negative COVID-19 test result taken no more than 1 day before travel or Documentation of Recovery from COVID-19 in the past 90 days. [Foreign nationals](#) have an additional requirement for proof of COVID-19 vaccination.
- All travelers: Get tested 3-5 days after arrival in the United States.

Within the United States:

- [All travelers](#): Follow all state, tribal, local, and territorial health recommendations and requirements at your destination.
- All travelers: Consider getting tested as close to the time of departure as possible (no more than 3 days) before your trip.
- Get tested after travel if your trip involved situations with greater risk of exposure such as being in crowded places while not wearing a well-fitting mask or respirator.

NOTE: Cruise travel has different guidance. See [Cruise Ship Travel During COVID-19](#).

[More on Travel >](#)

Work or School?

Participate in screening program as required and/or recommended by work or school.

[More on Workplaces >](#)

[More on Schools >](#)

An Upcoming Event or Gathering?

- Reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19 by getting tested as close to the event date as possible.
- 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.

[More on Self-Testing >](#)



COVID-19 Viral Testing Tool

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

[Get Started](#)[About the Tool](#)

Where Can I Get a Test?

Visit your [state](#), [tribal](#), [local](#) [link](#), or [territorial](#) health department's website for the latest local information on testing.

Laboratory or Rapid Point-of-Care Tests

- Many pharmacies and community centers provide access to free COVID-19 tests. Visit [Community-Based Testing Centers](#) [link](#) or the [Increasing Community Access to Testing \(ICATT\)](#) website to find testing locations in your area.

Self-Tests

- Order free tests at [COVIDtests.gov](#) [link](#). 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](#) [link](#) 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.

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

The test did not detect the virus, **but doesn't rule out an infection.**

- If you have a negative test, but have symptoms of COVID-19:
 - You may have COVID-19, but tested before the virus was detectable, or you may have another illness, such as the flu.

- Contact your healthcare provider if you have any questions about your test result, recommendations for quarantine or isolation, or your symptoms, especially if they worsen.
- If you do not have symptoms of COVID-19 but were a [close contact](#) to someone with COVID-19, and you tested negative 5 days after exposure:
 - The virus was not detected. You are likely not infected, but an infection cannot be completely ruled out.
 - Follow CDC's [Quarantine and Isolation](#) guidance, including monitoring for symptoms and wearing a well-fitting mask.
- If you do not have symptoms of COVID-19 and do not have a known exposure to a person with COVID-19:
 - You do not need to quarantine.

Take Steps to Protect Yourself



Whether you test positive or negative for COVID-19, you should take preventive measures to [protect yourself and others](#).

Additional Resources

DON'T DELAY: TEST SOON AND TREAT EARLY | COVID-19 |

If you are at high risk of getting very sick from COVID-19, and test positive, treatment may be available.



Get tested as soon as possible after your symptoms start.

Don't Delay: Test Soon and Treat Early

File Details: 361 KB, 1 page

[View PDF in English](#)



[Additional Languages](#)

Last Updated May 16, 2022