



COVID-19 Testing: What You Need to Know

Updated May 16, 2022



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

Types of COVID-19 Tests

COVID-19 tests can detect either **SARS-CoV-2** or **biomarkers** of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, or **antibodies** that your body makes after getting COVID-19 or after getting vaccinated.

Tests for **SARS-CoV-2** tell you [if you have an infection](#) at the time of the test. This type of test is called a “viral” test because it looks for viral infection. Antigen tests, [Nucleic Acid Amplification Tests \(NAATs\)](#) and [other tests](#) are viral tests.

Tests for **antibodies** may tell you [if you have had a past infection](#) with the virus that causes COVID-19. Your body creates antibodies after getting infected with SARS-CoV-2 or after getting vaccinated against COVID-19. These tests are called “antibody” or “serology” tests.

Testing is very important to help reduce the spread of COVID-19. You should always discuss your test results with your healthcare provider.

Viral Tests

- A **viral test** tells you if you are infected with **SARS-CoV-2**, the virus that causes COVID-19, using samples that come from your nose or mouth. There are two types of viral tests: rapid tests and laboratory tests. COVID-19 testing is 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.
- **Rapid Point-of-Care tests**, test performed or interpreted by someone other than the individual being tested, 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, are easy to use, and produce rapid results.
- **Laboratory tests** can take days to complete and include RT-PCR and other types of NAATs.



Watch Video: [Viral Test for COVID-19 \[00:01:08\]](#)

Antibody Tests

An **antibody test** (also known as a serology test) can detect antibodies to SARS-CoV-2 in your blood. **Antibodies** are proteins that your immune system makes to help fight infection and protect you from getting sick in the future.

Antibody tests should not be used to diagnose a current infection, but they may indicate if you had a past infection. Antibody tests help learn about how human immune systems defend against the virus, as well as learn about population-level protection. If you get an antibody test after receiving a [vaccine](#), you might test positive by some (but not all) antibody tests. This depends on which type of antibody the specific test detects.

Antibody testing is [not currently recommended](#) to determine:

- If you have a current infection.
- If you have immunity to SARS-CoV-2 following COVID-19 vaccination.
- Whether you need to get a [booster](#) following COVID-19 vaccination.
- Whether you need to [quarantine](#) after a known or suspected exposure to COVID-19.

 **Watch Video:** [Antibody Test for COVID-19 \[00:01:06\]](#)

Science at CDC

Scientific evidence and studies behind specific COVID-19 guidance and recommendations

Science Briefs

MMWR COVID-19 Reports

Need a COVID-19 Test?

Reasons to Get Tested	Types of Viral Tests	Actions After Result
• If you have COVID-19 symptoms • At least 5 days after known or suspected close contact to COVID-19 • For screening (schools, workplaces, congregate settings, etc.) • Before and after travel • When asked by a healthcare professional or public health official	Laboratory Test • Sample can either be a nasal swab or saliva • Results usually in 1-3 days • Results are reliable for people with and without symptoms • No follow-up test required • Common example: PCR test Rapid Test • Sample is usually a nasal swab • Results usually in 15-30 minutes • Results may be less reliable for people without symptoms • Follow-up test may be required • Common example: Antigen test	If Positive Result • Isolate for at least 5 days. Learn more about isolation timelines and precautions • Seek a confirmatory, follow-up laboratory test if recommended by healthcare professional • Monitor your symptoms If Negative Result • If up to update on vaccines: return to normal activities. Wear a mask indoors in areas where the COVID-19 Community Level is high. • If not up to date on vaccines and have symptoms or exposure: quarantine for at least 5 days. • If not up to date on vaccines and have no symptoms or exposure: return to normal activities. Take steps to get up to date on vaccines to protect yourself and others.

Testing Tools

These chatbots ask a series of questions, and provide recommended actions and resources based on your responses.



Coronavirus Self-Checker

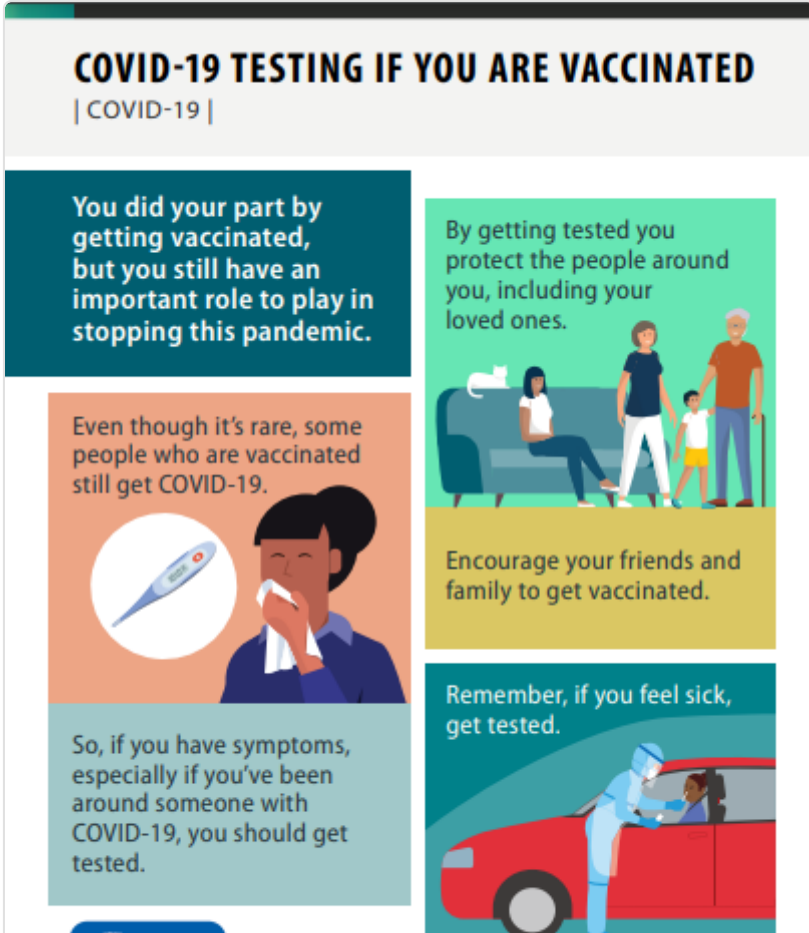
A tool to help you make decisions on when to seek testing and medical care.

[Get Started](#)

[About the Tool](#)

Need additional help? [CDC's Viral Testing Tool](#) is an online, mobile-friendly tool that asks a series of questions, and provides recommended actions and resources based on a user's responses.

Print Resources

DO YOUR PART: GET TESTED COVID-19 	COVID-19 TESTING IF YOU ARE VACCINATED COVID-19
	
 [PDF - 426 KB, 1 Page]	 [PDF - 1 page, 129 KB]

COVID-19

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

To protect yourself and others regardless of your vaccination status, take these 3 key steps **NOW** while waiting for your test results:

1 Follow recommendations for quarantine and monitor your health.

Stay away from others:

- If possible, stay away from others, especially people who are more likely to get sick from COVID-19.



If you were exposed to COVID-19 and:

- **Are NOT up to date on COVID-19 vaccinations,** stay home and quarantine for at least 5 days and wear a well-fitting mask for 10 days anytime you must be around others.
- **Are up to date on your COVID-19 vaccinations,** you do not need to stay home and quarantine. Wear a well-fitting mask for 10 days anytime you must be around others.
- **Had confirmed COVID-19 within the past 90 days,** you do not need to stay home unless you develop symptoms. Wear a well-fitting mask for 10 days anytime you must be around others.

Monitor your health:

- Watch for symptoms until 10 days after your exposure to COVID-19. If you develop symptoms, isolate immediately and wear a well-fitting mask around others.



Symptoms can include:

- Fever or chills
- Cough
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Tiredness
- Muscle or body aches
- Headache
- New loss of taste or smell
- Sore throat
- Congestion or runny nose
- Nausea or vomiting
- Diarrhea

2 Think about the people you have recently been around.

While you wait for your COVID-19 test result, think about anyone you have come into close contact with starting 2 days before your symptoms began (or two days before you test if you do not have symptoms). This information can help with contact tracing efforts and help slow the spread of COVID-19 in your community.

Complete the information on the back of this page to help you remember everyone you have been around.

3 Answer the phone call from the health department.

If a public health worker calls you, answer the call to help slow the spread of COVID-19 in your community.

- Discussions with public health workers are **confidential**. This means that your personal and medical information will be kept private and only shared with those who may need to know, like your health care provider.
- Your name will not be shared with those you came in **contact** with. The public health worker will only notify people you were in **close contact** with that they might have been exposed to COVID-19.



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cdc.gov/coronavirus

3key-steps-when-waiting-for-COVID-19-results

 [PDF - 2 Pages, 232 KB]



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 PROTECT OTHERS REGARDLESS OF YOUR COVID-19 VACCINATION STATUS



STAY HOME.
Isolate at home for at least 10 days.
Stay in a specific room and away from other people in your home.



STAY IN TOUCH WITH YOUR DOCTOR.
Contact your doctor as soon as possible if you are an older adult or have underlying medical conditions.



GET REST AND STAY HYDRATED.
If you develop symptoms, continue to isolate for at least 10 days after symptoms began and until you do not have a fever without using medications to reduce fever.



CONTACT YOUR DOCTOR OR HEALTH DEPARTMENT ABOUT ISOLATION IF YOU

- Are severely ill or have a weakened immune system.
- Had a positive test result followed by a negative result.
- Test positive for many weeks.

If you test negative for COVID-19:

- The virus was not detected.

If you have symptoms of COVID-19:

- You may have received a false negative test result and still might have COVID-19.
- Isolate from others.

If you do not have symptoms of COVID-19 and you were exposed to a person with COVID-19:

- You are likely not infected, but you still may get sick.
- Contact your doctor about your symptoms, about follow-up testing, and how long to isolate.
- Self-quarantine for 14 days at home after your exposure.
- If you are fully vaccinated, you do not need to self-quarantine.
- Contact your doctor or local health department regarding options to reduce the length of your quarantine.

A negative test result does not mean you won't get sick later.



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

What Your Test Results Mean

[PDF - 216 KB, 1 page]

GOOD THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT A COVID-19 TEST | COVID-19 |

FREE

COVID-19 tests are [available at no cost nationwide](#) at health centers and select pharmacies.



EFFECTIVE

COVID-19 tests are effective at detecting a COVID-19 infection.

QUICK

Current rapid COVID-19 tests provide results in 15 minutes.



www.cdc.gov/covidtesting

Good Things to Know About A COVID-19 Test

[PDF - 55KB, 1 Page]

WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN GETTING TESTED

| COVID-19 |

Most COVID-19 tests use swabs to gather samples.

You can get your test results as quickly as 15 minutes or up to a few days, depending on the type of test.



Some testing locations may be crowded. While you are waiting to get your test and results, wear a mask and stay at least 6 feet apart from others.

Your Results

If you test **NEGATIVE** for COVID-19, the virus was not detected.

- You are likely not infected.
- For more information about the types of COVID-19 tests and why you might have tested negative, go to www.cdc.gov/covidtesting.



If you test **POSITIVE** take [steps to protect others](#) regardless of your COVID-19 vaccination status.

- Isolate from others for at least 10 days since symptoms first appeared.
- Avoid contact with other members of your household and pets.



www.cdc.gov/covidtesting

What to Expect When Getting Tested

[PDF - 183 KB, 1 page]

Resources

COVID-19 Testing Resources 

Related Pages

- › [Test for Current Infection](#)
- › [Test for Past Infection](#)

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