Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

Testing for COVID-19

Guidance on Interpreting COVID-19 Test Results [610 KB] : A guide for interpreting test results and determining what actions to take.

Two kinds of tests are available for COVID-19: viral tests and antibody tests.

- A viral test tells you if you have a current infection.
- An antibody test tells you if you had a previous infection.

An antibody test may not be able to show if you have a current infection, because it can take 1-3 weeks after infection to make antibodies. We do not know yet if having antibodies to the virus can protect someone from getting infected with the virus again, or how long that protection might last.

Who should be tested

To learn if you have a current infection, viral tests are used. But not everyone needs this test.

- Most people will have mild illness and can recover at home without medical care and may not need to be tested.
- CDC has guidance for who should be tested, but decisions about testing are made by state and local health departments or healthcare providers.
- If you have symptoms of COVID-19 and want to get tested, call your healthcare provider first.
- You can also visit your state or local health department's website to look for the latest local information on testing.
- Although **supplies of tests are increasing, it may still be difficult to find a place to get tested**.

Results

- **If you test positive for COVID-19 by a viral test**, know what protective steps to take if you are sick or caring for someone.
- **If you test negative for COVID-19 by a viral test**, you probably were not infected at the time your sample was collected. However, that does not mean you will not get sick. The test result only means that you did not have COVID-19 at the time of testing.

If you test positive or negative for COVID-19, no matter the type of test, you still should take preventive measures toprotect yourself and others.

For healthcare professionals
For information on evaluating and testing, see recommendations for reporting, testing, and specimen collection.

For public health professionals
For information on antibody surveillance, see objectives and types of surveys.

For laboratorians
For information on CDC viral and antibody testing, see information on CDC lab tests.

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