



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 to [protect 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](#).

Page last reviewed: May 1, 2020

Content source: [National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases \(NCIRD\), Division of Viral Diseases](#)