CDC Centers for Disease
Control and Prevention

COVID-19

We have the tools to
Fight Omicron

Vaccines & Booster   Masks   Testing

COVID-19 Testing: What You Need to Know

Updated Feb. 1, 2022

CDC has updated isolation and quarantine recommendations for the public, and is revising the CDC website to reflect these changes. These recommendations do not apply to healthcare personnel and do not supersede state, local, tribal, or territorial laws, rules, and regulations.

🧪 **Free At-Home COVID-19 Tests:** Order 4 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**, 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 or Nucleic Acid Amplification Tests (NAATs) 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 and some NAATs.
    - 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] ↗

Need a COVID-19 Test?

Reasons to Get Tested

- 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

Types of Viral Tests

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

Actions After Result

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 of high or substantial community transmission.
- 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

Take steps to get up to date on vaccines to protect yourself and others.

Download Graphic: Need a COVID-19 Test? 🖼 [JPG – 341 KB]

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.

Testing Tools

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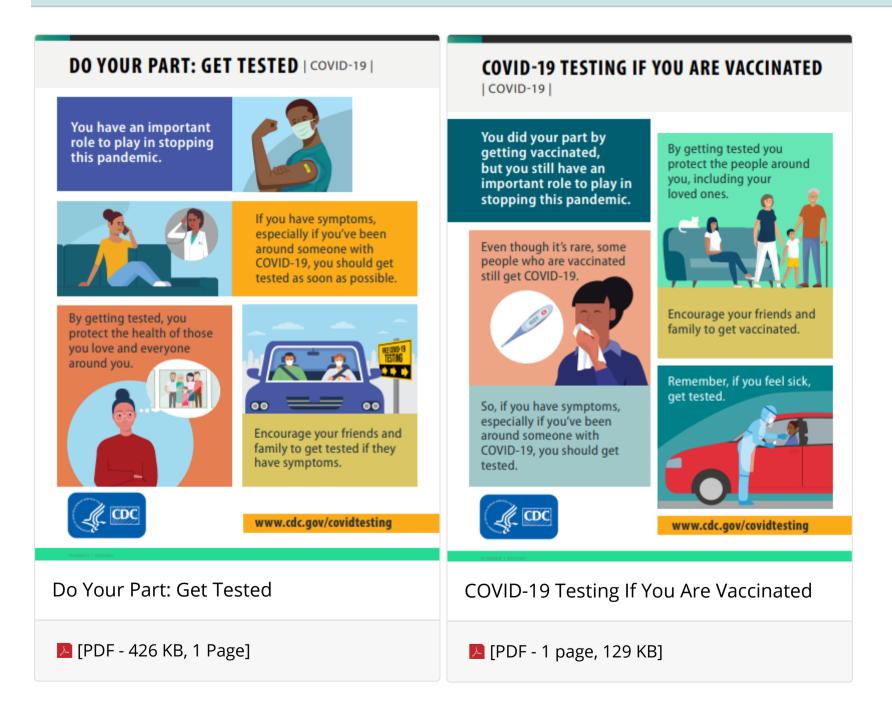
Coronavirus Self-Checker

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

Get Started   About the Tool

Print Resources

Do Your Part: Get Tested

📄 [PDF - 426 KB, 1 Page]

COVID-19 Testing If You Are Vaccinated

📄 [PDF - 1 page, 129 KB]

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.
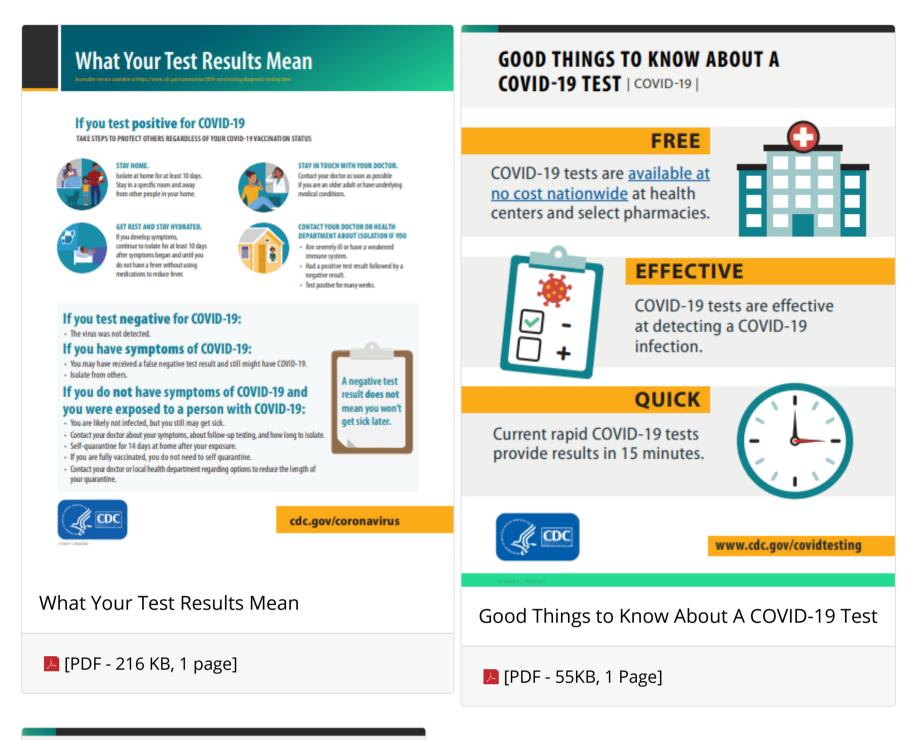
CDC

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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

[PDF - 216 KB, 1 page]

Good Things to Know About A COVID-19 Test

[PDF - 55KB, 1 Page]

What to Expect When Getting Tested

[PDF - 183 KB, 1 page]

Related Pages

> › Test for Current Infection

> › Test for Past Infection

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