Getting Tested for COVID-19:
What You Need to Know

Should You Get Tested?

People who should get tested for coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) include those who have:

- COVID-19 symptoms
- Been in close contact (less than 6 feet away for 15 minutes or longer) with someone who has COVID-19
- Been asked to get tested by their doctor or health department. This may happen if you've traveled or been somewhere with a high infection rate, have been in a large group, or have a job that may expose you to infection, such as a healthcare worker

Whether you get tested or not, if you have COVID-19 symptoms or think you've been exposed to the virus that causes COVID-19, it's important to stay home and self-isolate.

Types of COVID-19 Tests

There are 2 main types of COVID-19 tests -- tests that check for virus, and those that check for antibodies.

A **viral test** checks samples from your nose or throat to see if you have current infection. Types include a PCR (polymerase chain reaction) test that checks for genetic material from the virus, and an antigen test that checks for proteins from the virus.

An **antibody test** checks for past infection by looking at a sample of your blood to see if you have antibodies. Antibodies are proteins your immune system (your body's natural defense system) makes when you're exposed to an outside invader -- such as a virus -- to help fight off infection. Having antibodies means you were exposed to the virus in the past.

What Your Test Results Mean

Results can take minutes or days to get back, depending on the test used. You should stay home and self-isolate until you get your results.

Results from a viral test:

- If you test **positive**, make sure you self-isolate and take the necessary steps to protect yourself and others. Most people will have mild illness and can recover at home. Be sure to talk to your doctor if you have questions or symptoms that get worse
- If you test **negative**, it's likely you weren't infected when your sample was taken. It doesn't mean you can't get infected. You can still be exposed to the virus and get infected after the test, and then potentially spread it to others. If you take an antigen test and it comes back negative, your doctor may recommend you also get a PCR test

Results from an antibody test:

- If you test **positive**, it's likely you developed antibodies from having an earlier infection or being exposed to the virus in the past. You may now be protected (immune) from getting infected, but it's still not known how much protection antibodies will give you or how long protection may last. Getting infected again may be possible
- If you test **negative**, it's likely you didn't have COVID-19 or weren't exposed to the virus. But it is possible that you have a current infection, or were infected recently and your body just hasn't had time to make antibodies yet. This means you could still get COVID-19
- Testing **positive or negative** with an antibody test doesn't tell you if you can spread the virus to others or not

No matter which test you get, talk to your doctor about your results to understand what they mean. Your doctor may recommend you get a second or a follow-up test. And whether your results come back positive or negative with any test, always take the necessary precautions of wearing a mask in public, keeping at least 6 feet away from others, and washing your hands frequently to protect yourself and others.