

COVID-19 Testing: FAQs

Last Updated November 16, 2020.



1. There are so many different kinds of tests. Which test should I get?

COVID-19 tests typically fall into 3 main categories: polymerase chain reaction (PCR) tests (also called molecular tests), antigen tests, and antibody tests (also known as serology tests). Each test has a role and a proper use.

| | PCR Test | Antigen Test | Antibody Test |
|---------------------------|--|--|--|
| Who should use this test? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> People who have COVID-19 symptoms OR <ul style="list-style-type: none"> People who have no COVID-19 symptoms at all | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> People <u>with symptoms</u>, within 7 days of when their symptoms began OR <ul style="list-style-type: none"> People undergoing ongoing, routine screening (i.e., people within nursing homes) <p>Please note: Antigen tests are <u>NOT</u> recommended for people without symptoms.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> People trying to find out if they were infected in the past OR <ul style="list-style-type: none"> People participating in research studies |
| What do the results mean? | <p>Positive: Person has active COVID-19 infection or recent infection. (Some people continue to test positive, even if they have “recovered” and are no longer considered infectious). If you get a positive result, please answer the call from a contact tracer.</p> <p>Negative: COVID-19 was not detected at the time the sample was collected. This does not mean a person won’t develop symptoms or test positive in the future.</p> | <p>Positive, when test is used appropriately: Person has active COVID-19 infection. If you get a positive result, please answer the call from a contact tracer.</p> <p>Negative, when test is used appropriately: COVID-19 infection was not detected at the time the sample was collected. This does not mean a person won’t develop symptoms or test positive in the future.</p> <p><u>False negative and false positive test results are possible when the test is not used correctly</u>, particularly in individuals without symptoms. A follow-up with a PCR test is recommended in many situations.</p> | <p>Positive: Person may have been infected with COVID-19 in the past. *Please note: Researchers are still trying to determine how much protection past infection provides and how long that protection lasts. Detection of antibodies does NOT indicate “immunity” to COVID-19.</p> <p>Negative: Person may not have had COVID-19 in the past.</p> |
| How long for results? | Varies. Normally 24-72 hours, but longer when demand is very high. A few providers offer rapid PCR results. | About 30 minutes. | Varies. Call providers for details. |

Adapted from Stratford Health Department materials.

2. When should I get tested?

| If you... | Get tested... |
|--|--|
| ...have symptoms of COVID-19 | ...as soon as possible |
| ...live with someone with COVID-19 | ...as soon as possible |
| ...have been in close contact with someone who has COVID-19 | ...soon, but wait about 5 days after your exposure |
| ...don’t have symptoms and have not been in close contact with anyone who has COVID-19 | ...regularly (about once a month) |

3. What should I do while awaiting results?

In short, stay home and away from others, especially if you have symptoms or you know you've been exposed. More detailed guidance:

| If you... | While waiting for results... |
|--|--|
| ...have symptoms or suspect you have COVID-19 | ...stay home and isolate away from others |
| ...live with or have been in close contact with someone who has COVID-19 | ...quarantine at home for 14 days after your exposure, even with a negative test (see #5 below) |
| ...don't have symptoms and have not been in close contact with anyone who has COVID-19 | ...stay home if you can, but if you cannot, continue to follow all normal precautions: avoid gatherings with people outside your household, wear a mask and maintain 6 feet distance from others in public, and be extra careful around anyone at increased risk of serious complications from COVID-19. |

4. My test results just came back negative. Does that mean I can be around others without masks and distancing without risk?

No. A test is a "snapshot in time." A negative test is a great result, but it just means that COVID-19 was not detected at the exact time your sample was collected. It is possible—and not uncommon—for someone to test negative on one day and then develop symptoms and/or test positive the next.

This occurs because the incubation period for COVID-19 (i.e., the time between when a person is exposed and when illness develops) can be anywhere from 2 to 14 days.

5. I am currently quarantining because I was in close contact with someone who tested positive for COVID-19. Does a negative test allow me to go back to work, school, extracurricular activities, etc.?

No. You cannot test out of quarantine. The quarantine period lasts 14 days from the last exposure, even if you test negative during the quarantine period. We recommend that close contacts get tested, but a negative test does not mean they can end their quarantine. See #4 above.

6. Where can I find a testing provider close to me?

The City of Norwalk is working to expand testing options. You can search for updated testing information at any of the following sites.

- Pop-up testing sites: <https://www.norwalkct.org/2312/COVID-19-Testing>
- Regular testing information: <https://www.norwalkct.org/2315/Get-Tested>
- State contracted, free testing: www.ct.gov/prioritytesting
- All testing sites statewide: www.211ct.org/covidtesting

7. Who can I call to get my results?

The testing provider should notify you in a timely manner with your test results, but we know that as demand increases, turnaround time for results may increase. You should contact the testing provider directly for results. Visit <https://www.norwalkct.org/2312/COVID-19-Testing> for a listing of providers at previous community testing events.