



SARS-CoV-2 Antibody (Serologic) Testing Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

How do antibody (serologic) tests work?

Serologic tests look for the presence of antibodies, which are specific proteins made in response to infections. Antibodies can be found in your blood and other tissues after an infection. For SARS-CoV-2, the virus which causes COVID-19, serologic tests look for antibodies to the virus in the blood. It can take 1 to 3 weeks (or occasionally longer) after an infection before a person's body makes enough antibodies to be detected by a test. Some people may never make any antibodies to SARS-CoV-2.

How are antibody (serologic) tests different than tests used to diagnose SARS-CoV-2 infection?

Antibody tests are *not* very useful in diagnosing a *current* infection with the SARS-CoV-2 virus. Depending on when someone was infected and the timing of the serologic test, a person's body may not have developed antibodies to the virus yet. A serologic test can also give a "false positive" result, since certain tests are more likely to detect antibodies to other more common coronaviruses (such as ones that cause the common cold) than others. Ask your healthcare provider how likely your antibody test is to give a false positive result.

Some companies are offering "at home" serologic tests, but none of them have been authorized by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). If you use one of these tests, it is important to discuss the result with your healthcare provider.

The tests used to *diagnose* someone with SARS-CoV-2 infection look at samples from the inside of the nose or from saliva for the virus itself. If you 1) have symptoms of COVID-19, or 2) have been exposed to someone with symptoms or who has been diagnosed with COVID-19, talk to your doctor about getting a "diagnostic" test. Unlike with serologic tests, the FDA has authorized some at-home sample collection kits to look for a current SARS-CoV-2 infection. Click [here](#) for more information about understanding your test results.

When are antibody (serologic) tests most useful?

Antibody tests are most useful in communities where there have been many SARS-CoV-2 infections, and when:

- Someone seeks medical care between 9 to 14 days after symptoms of COVID-19 began.
- Someone has COVID-like symptoms for longer than usual and *diagnostic* tests are negative.
- Someone has complications, such as [Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome in Children](#) (MIS-C), which may be related to having COVID-19.

Serology tests can also be used to find people who have had SARS-CoV-2 infection in the past. They may be able to donate blood that can be used to help treat patients with severe COVID-19 disease. In addition, scientists use antibody tests to learn more about how the immune system responds to the SARS-CoV-2 virus over time. The tests can help us understand why some people get infected but never show any symptoms. Antibody tests can also tell us how many people in a community may have been infected with the virus at some point.



What does a positive antibody (serologic) test mean?

A positive serologic test for SARS-CoV-2 means one of the following things:

- You were infected with SARS-CoV-2 at some point in time. The infection could have been recent or several months ago. If you have symptoms of COVID-19, you should follow [isolation instructions](#) and ask your doctor if you need to be given a *diagnostic* test.
- The result is a “false positive”, and the test is picking up antibodies to another type of coronavirus. If your healthcare provider is concerned that your antibody test results might not be accurate, they may order a second, different serologic test to confirm the results.

Having antibodies may prevent you from becoming infected again, which is called “immunity”, but we don’t know how long immunity to SARS-CoV-2 will last. Over time, it may be possible to be re-infected with SARS-CoV-2 and transmit the infection to other people. Because of this, a positive result on an antibody test should NOT be used to make decisions about going back to work or spending time with other people. **It is also very important that you continue to [protect yourself](#) and others from exposure to SARS-CoV-2 even if your antibody test is positive.**

What does a negative antibody (serologic) test mean?

A negative serologic test for SARS-CoV-2 means one of the following things:

- You have never been infected with the SARS-CoV-2 virus.
- You are currently infected but have not developed antibodies yet.
- You have been infected, and you do have antibodies. But the test is not detecting them. This result is called a “false negative”.

If you have symptoms of COVID-19, you should follow [isolation instructions](#) and ask your doctor if you need to be given a *diagnostic* test.

Where can I find more information?

[Antibody \(Serology\) Testing for COVID-19: Information for Patients and Consumers](#)

[Serology/Antibody Test FAQs](#)

[EUA Authorized Serology Test Performance](#)

[Independent Evaluations of COVID-19 Serological Tests](#)

[Interim Guidelines for COVID-19 Antibody Testing](#)

[Testing for Past COVID-19 Infection: Antibody Tests \(Serology\)](#)