

Facts

Understanding COVID-19 Test Results



Asking what type of test you are getting can help you understand your results and make informed decisions about your health. Some tests are more reliable than others and all tests occasionally result in false positive or negative results. Sometimes the results are not definitive, and results should always be reviewed by a healthcare professional. **If you were told to quarantine for 14 days because you had close contact with someone known to have COVID-19, you need to complete your quarantine, even if you test negative.**

MOLECULAR TESTING *most reliable test type for current infection; detects virus genetic material; also known as PCR testing*

	What It Means	What You Should Do
Positive	You likely DO have an active COVID-19 infection and can give the virus to others.	Stay home and away from others for at least 10 days and follow ACPHD Isolation instructions .
Negative	You likely DO NOT have an active COVID-19 infection.	If you have symptoms, keep monitoring yourself, stay home and away from others and seek medical advice to see if you should get tested again.
		If you don't have symptoms, get tested again only if your medical provider says so.

ANTIGEN *tests for current infection; detects for virus proteins*

	What It Means	What You Should Do
Positive	If you have symptoms, you likely DO have an active COVID-19 infection and can give the virus to others.	Stay home and away from others for at least 10 days and follow ACPHD Isolation instructions .
	If you don't have symptoms, you still likely have an active COVID-19 infection and can give the virus to others.	Stay home and away from others for at least 10 days and follow ACPHD Isolation instructions . Keep monitoring for symptoms and seek medical care if you get sick.
Negative	If you have symptoms, you STILL COULD HAVE an active COVID-19 infection and can give the virus to others.	Stay home and away from others for at least 10 days and follow ACPHD Isolation instructions . Seek medical advice to see if you should get tested again with a PCR test.
	If you do not have symptoms, a negative antigen test does not provide useful information and you STILL COULD HAVE an active COVID-19 infection.	If you are a close contact of someone who has tested positive for COVID-19, stay home and follow ACPHD quarantine guidance . Seek medical advice to see if you need to get tested again using a PCR test and how long you should stay home. If you are not a close contact, you could still have COVID-19. Seek medical advice to see if you should get tested again with a PCR test. Protect yourself and others.

ANTIBODY TESTING *tests for past infection with the virus; also known as serologic testing*

	What It Means	What You Should Do
Positive	You likely have HAD a COVID-19 infection and have developed antibodies.	You may be protected from re-infection (have immunity), but this is not certain. Scientists are conducting studies to learn more. Protect yourself and others.
Negative	You likely NEVER HAD (or have not yet developed antibodies to) COVID-19 infection.	You could still get COVID-19, or you may have COVID-19 and your body has not yet developed antibodies. Protect yourself and others.



Alameda County
Health Care Services Agency



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Celebrating Healthy People in Healthy Communities

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Ver: 9/1/2020