

Primary Care

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What You Should Know About COVID-19 Antibody Testing

The COVID-19 (also called SARS-CoV-2) Antibody test shows if you have already been exposed to COVID-19 more than 14 days ago and have developed an immune response. **THIS IS NOT A TEST TO SEE IF YOU HAVE A COVID-19 INFECTION AT PRESENT. IF YOU CURRENTLY HAVE SYMPTOMS OF COVID-19 OR REASON TO THINK YOU MAY BE INFECTED NOW, YOU NEED A NASAL SWAB TEST, NOT THE ANTIBODY TEST.**

Antibodies are proteins that the body creates to help fight infections. Antibodies start developing within a few days after an infection starts and then become more easily detectable in the blood about 14 days after the symptoms started. Antibodies generally help protect us from getting reinfected, however it has not yet been established if having antibodies protects you from getting COVID-19 again. And, even if it does provide immunity, we do not presently know how long that immunity will last.

The test result only shows if antibodies are "Positive" or "Negative" The test does not measure the amount of antibody detected. So we can't tell if you have small amount of Antibodies to COVID-19 or if you have a lot.

The test is very sensitive which means that if you were infected with COVID-19 more than 14 days ago the test will show "Positive" Antibodies 100% of the time. However, about 1% of the time "Positive" could be a false positive. This means that the test is indicating that Antibodies to COVID-19 were detected, but actually it's picking up Antibodies to some other coronavirus.

If your test result says COVID-19/SARS-CoV-2 "Negative", this means:

- There is no indication you had COVID-19 infection prior to 14 days ago
- You are not immune and can therefore still catch COVID-19 infection
- You need to continue to take all necessary precautions not to catch the infection
- If you happened to pick up COVID-19 infection within the past 14 days we are not able to tell from this test and yet you could be contagious and about to become ill.

If your test result says COVID-19/SARS-CoV-2 "Positive", this means:

- You most likely were infected with COVID-19 and have now developed an immune response.
- But, there is a very small chance (about 1%) that you were actually infected with a different coronavirus that the test is picking up, and you did not actually have COVID-19. In this case you would still be susceptible to getting infected with COVID-19.
- If you did already have COVID-19 infection, we cannot tell the timing of the infection although it was most likely prior to the last couple of weeks
- Although you have antibodies, we don't yet know if people who have already been infected with COVID-19 can catch the infection again. For this reason, until we know better you should still maintain the same precautions as though you are susceptible.