

## Diagnostic COVID-19 Testing FAQs

### What is the difference between PCR/antigen testing and serologic (antibody) testing for COVID-19?

Molecular (PCR) or antigen testing is used to detect SARS-CoV-2 (the virus causing COVID-19) in respiratory specimens of patients suspected of having active COVID-19. Serology (antibody) testing is used to detect antibodies against SARS-CoV-2 present in serum (blood) indicating previous exposure/infection.

### What testing currently is available to diagnose active COVID-19 infection?

Two types of testing are currently available to diagnose active COVID-19 infections, a traditional PCR test that is sent to a lab and a rapid diagnostic test that is performed as either a PCR or antigen test and is run on site at the location the swab is obtained. Rapid COVID-19 tests can provide results within 30 minutes after testing while traditional testing can take one to five days to receive results.

### How is the test performed?

Most testing is performed by taking a swab from the nose to test for the presence of the SARS-CoV-2 virus. This swab may be performed by a health care professional or patients may be asked to perform this swab on themselves.

### How accurate is the test?

Accuracy of the test depends on several factors, including the time since onset of the illness, the concentration of virus in the specimen, the quality of the specimen collected from an individual and the individual test kit. One of the main advantages of an antigen test is the speed of the test, which can provide results in minutes. However, antigen tests may not detect all active infections, as they do not work the same way as a PCR test. Antigen tests are very specific for the virus, but are not as sensitive as molecular PCR tests. This means that positive results from antigen tests are highly accurate, but there is a higher chance of false negatives, so negative results do not rule out infection.

### What does a positive result mean?

A positive test for COVID-19 indicates active infection with the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

### What does a negative result mean?

A negative test for COVID-19 means an individual was probably not infected at the time their sample was collected. However, that does not ensure that they will not get sick in the future. It is possible that they were very early in their infection when their sample was collected and that they could test positive later or that the testing sample was inadequate. They also could be exposed after the time of testing. False negatives are also a concern, especially with antigen testing. A negative test result does not guarantee that an individual is not infected with the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

### Who should be tested with a rapid vs. traditional test?

Testing should be prioritized based on the current availability of test kits in the community. In areas of limited supply, rapid diagnostic test kits should be reserved for situations requiring immediate results to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Examples include pregnant women in active labor, patients requiring emergent surgery, and new nursing home admissions.

### What testing is currently available in Ohio?

Both traditional and rapid COVID-19 diagnostic testing are currently available, however only a limited supply of rapid diagnostic test kits are currently available in Ohio at this time.