

What do I need to know about COVID-19 tests?



The only way to know for sure if you have COVID-19 is to get tested. This is important because if you know you have COVID-19, you can talk to your doctor right away about your treatment options. And you can take steps to help prevent other people from getting sick.

Who needs to get tested for COVID-19?

It's important to get a COVID-19 test if:¹

- You have COVID-19 symptoms, like fever, cough, or body aches
- You've been around someone who has COVID-19
- Your doctor or local health department asked you to get tested

Experts are learning more about COVID-19 every day. For the latest testing recommendations, visit [who.int/COVID-19](https://www.who.int/COVID-19) or [cdc.gov/COVID-19](https://www.cdc.gov/COVID-19).

Where can I get a COVID-19 test?

You may be able to get tested at your doctor's office, at a hospital, or at a community testing site.

If you're not sure where to get tested, call your doctor or check with your local health department.²



¹ U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/testing.html>

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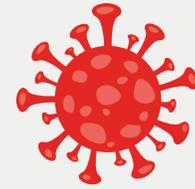
How do COVID-19 tests work?

The most common type of COVID-19 test is a **PCR test**. (PCR stands for polymerase chain reaction.) These tests check whether you have COVID-19 virus in your body.

The most common way to get a PCR test is with a nose swab. A nurse or medical assistant will put a long cotton swab in your nose and move it around for about 15 seconds.

They may put a swab down your throat or ask you to spit into a container instead, but this is less common.

Some tests have to be sent to a lab, and it can take a day or more to get results. Other tests, called **rapid tests**, give results in less than an hour.³



What is an antibody test?

An **antibody test**, also called a **serology test**, is a different type of COVID-19 test. It looks for antibodies in the blood to figure out if you had COVID-19 in the past. An antibody test can't show if you currently have COVID-19.⁴



³ U.S. Food and Drug Administration: <https://www.fda.gov/consumers/consumer-updates/coronavirus-testing-basics>

⁴ U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/testing/serology-overview.html>

What do I do after I get tested?

While you wait for your results, stay at home and away from other people as much as you can — and wear a mask if you need to go out.

If the test shows that you **have** COVID-19 (positive test result):

- Tell your doctor right away. Be sure to mention what symptoms you have and when they started.
- Stay home except to see your doctor or get treatment. If you need to go out, wear a mask and stay away from other people as much as you can.

If the test shows that you **do not have** COVID-19 (negative test result):

- If you feel well, you can go back to your usual routine. But it's still important to take steps to help keep COVID-19 from spreading — like wearing a mask and keeping a safe distance from other people when you go out.
- If you or anyone you live with has COVID-19 symptoms, talk to your doctor. They may tell you to stay home and get tested again in a few days.⁵

What do my test results mean?

A **positive** test result means you have COVID-19. Scientists have found that a positive result is almost always true.

A **negative** test result means you probably don't have COVID-19. But you could still get the disease later.

It's also possible to get a negative test result even though you actually do have COVID-19 — especially if your infection has just started.⁶



⁵U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/steps-when-sick.html>

⁶U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/testing/diagnostic-testing.html>

What COVID-19 treatments are available?

Right now, there are a few treatment options for people who are in the hospital because of serious COVID-19 symptoms.⁷

There's also a type of COVID-19 treatment — called **neutralizing antibody drugs** — for newly diagnosed people with mild to moderate symptoms who are at high risk of getting very sick. These drugs may help limit the amount of virus in your body, which may help your symptoms improve sooner and make it less likely that you'll need to go to the hospital.⁸

What about medicines to treat specific symptoms?

Your doctor may recommend over-the-counter medicines — like pain relievers to help with fever and body aches, or cough medicine so coughing doesn't keep you awake at night. These medicines can help you feel better, but they won't help your body fight the virus or make you less likely to get very sick.⁹

Talk with your doctor about your treatment options. Ask about the risks, benefits, and side effects of each option. Together, you and your doctor can decide what's right for you.



⁷ National Institutes of Health: <https://www.covid19treatmentguidelines.nih.gov/>

⁸ U.S. Food and Drug Administration: <http://pi.lilly.com/eua/bamlanivimab-eua-fda-authorization-letter.pdf>

⁹ U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/treatments-for-severe-illness.html>