

Guidance on Testing for COVID-19

What are the symptoms of COVID-19 and who is most at risk?

People with COVID-19 may experience the disease differently. Symptoms range from mild to severe, though Elders and people who have heart or lung disease or diabetes seem to be at higher risk of developing serious health complications resulting from COVID-19.

People with the following symptoms may already be infected with COVID-19:

- **Fever (100.4 degrees Fahrenheit and above)**
- **Cough**
- **Difficulty breathing, or shortness of breath**
- **Chills**
- **New loss of taste or smell**
- **Muscle aches**
- **Headache**
- **Sore throat**
- **Nausea or vomiting**
- **Diarrhea**
- **Fatigue**
- **Congestion or runny nose**

If someone is exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19, they should contact their healthcare provider or contact an active COVID-19 medical hotline for advice regarding testing and isolation.

Someone should seek **emergency medical care** if they show signs of:

- **Difficulty breathing**
- **Persistent pain or pressure in the chest**
- **New confusion**
- **Inability to wake up or stay awake**
- **Bluish lips or face**



Who should get tested?

- **People who are showing symptoms of COVID-19**
- **People who have had close contact with someone who has a confirmed case of COVID-19**
- **People who have been asked to get a test, or have been referred for testing by their healthcare provider or local health department**

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) defines “close contact” as being within **6 feet** of an infected person for a cumulative total of **15 minutes or more within a 24-hour time period**. Tribes may choose to re-define “close contact” based on their own judgement (e.g. 10 minutes instead of 15 minutes). Tribal leaders may consider this as a minimum definition for “close contact” and should use their own discretion when providing guidance.

Early testing is an important factor in stopping the spread of COVID-19 disease in Tribal communities. Case managers and contact tracers should be available to identify networks of close contacts to recommend testing and/or isolation.

What testing options are available?

There are currently two different types of tests for COVID-19:

- **A viral test will tell someone whether they have a current infection**
- **An antibody test will tell someone whether they have had a past infection**

Viral Test (Diagnostic Test)			
What does it test for?	Will test whether you <i>currently</i> are infected with COVID-19		
How does the test work?	There are two types: PCR Tests and Antigen Tests		
	<table border="1" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%;">PCR Test: Finds genetic material from the virus</td> <td style="width: 50%;">Antigen Test: Finds proteins from the virus</td> </tr> </table>	PCR Test: Finds genetic material from the virus	Antigen Test: Finds proteins from the virus
PCR Test: Finds genetic material from the virus	Antigen Test: Finds proteins from the virus		
How is the sample collected for the test?	For both types of test, a nasal swab will be collected from the patient's nose or throat, or from saliva.		
When are the results available?	<table border="1" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%;">PCR Test: The samples will be sent to a lab and results are usually available in 2-5 days. In some places, rapid PCR tests are also available.</td> <td style="width: 50%;">Antigen Test: The samples can be analyzed in a medical setting and results are available in minutes</td> </tr> </table>	PCR Test: The samples will be sent to a lab and results are usually available in 2-5 days. In some places, rapid PCR tests are also available.	Antigen Test: The samples can be analyzed in a medical setting and results are available in minutes
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What does a positive test mean?	The patient most likely had COVID-19 at the time of the test and they should isolate at home, quarantine away from others and avoid public places.		
What does a negative test mean?	The patient likely did not have a COVID-19 infection at the time of the test. However, even with a negative test result, individuals who are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 should isolate at home and avoid contact with others.		

Antibody Test (Serology Test)	
What does it test for?	Can provide insight into whether a person has been exposed to COVID-19 or infected with COVID-19 in the past
How does the test work?	The test identifies antibodies within the body's immune system that result from infection with the virus
How is the sample collected for the test?	A blood sample is gathered from the patient and processed in a hospital or clinic.
When are the results available?	If the sample is processed in a hospital or clinic, results can be available within a few hours. If the sample needs to be sent to an outside lab, results may take a few days.
What does a positive test mean?	The individual likely has had a COVID-19 infection in the past. It is not known whether a past infection will protect the same individual from future COVID-19 infections
What does a negative test mean?	The individual likely did not have a COVID-19 infection in the past. As antibodies take time to develop within the body, and it is unknown how long they remain in the body after infection, a negative test can also occur if the test was taken too soon or too late after the infection.

What should someone do while waiting for the test results?

Once someone is tested, they should self-quarantine or isolate at home away from others while waiting for the test results. If the individual lives in a home with others, especially with elders, he or she should isolate within the home if possible, by remaining in a room away from the rest of the family.

Depending on the test type and the demand for testing, this waiting period can last several days. Individuals who get tested for COVID-19 should be provided with food or hygiene kits if necessary, to enable them to isolate properly without needing to visit a store for food or supplies.

In some places, alternate care locations are also available to individuals with COVID-19. This varies by location, but generally a large building such as a hotel or convention center can be transitioned to house COVID-19 patients where they can isolate and receive food and care during their illness.

Isolation can also be physically, mentally, and emotionally difficult. It is important to provide broad mental health support for all community members, and to utilize existing networks of healthcare providers, community health workers, and contact tracers to remain in regular contact with COVID-19 positive individuals. It is also important to provide contact information for mental health resources and providers available and accessible to community members.

Guidance for individuals who wish to be tested

If someone experiences symptoms of COVID-19 or has been exposed to a known COVID-positive individual, and wishes to be tested, they should call their health provider first or access a COVID-19 hotline. If Tribes or local IHS hospitals or clinics do not operate a COVID-19 hotline, there is usually a line operated by the state. Tribal leaders should confirm with their state and county regarding COVID-19 call-in hotlines.

If someone experiences COVID-like symptoms, the CDC has provided a [Coronavirus Self-Checker](#). This symptom checker can be accessed either online or through a mobile device and will provide guidance regarding whether testing is necessary.

Guidance for individuals who are symptomatic but receive a negative test result

If someone experiences symptoms of COVID-19, it is important to stay home and isolate away from others while getting rest and monitoring symptoms.

- If symptoms are manageable and isolation is possible, remain at home for 10 days after the start of symptoms and until it has been 24 hours without a fever.
- If going to a clinic is not possible, utilize a system for requesting a home test from local CHWs

Guidance for testing in cold winter conditions

Some locations experience cold winters which can create challenges for outdoor testing. If possible, it is recommended to test outdoors rather than inside clinics when there is a high demand for testing and a large number of people coming to the test facility. Prolonged exposure to cold temperatures can be dangerous for healthcare workers if they remain in the cold for extended periods of time.

Recommendations for patient and healthcare worker safety during cold weather:

- Use drive-through testing whenever possible so that the patient can remain in a vehicle
- Set up tents to provide shelter from snow or rain during testing
- Provide enclosed tents or shelters for healthcare workers to stay out of the wind to reduce the effect of windchill on the body
- Know the temperature and windchill each day and design shift rotations and number of staff based on how long an adult can be outdoors before they are at risk of hypothermia or frostbite (Consult the National Weather Service charts or local weather stations).
- If possible, provide a clean source of heat outdoors at the testing area, or inside a shelter for the healthcare workers (e.g. space heater or heat lamp rather than outdoor fire which will produce smoke)
- Ensure that the testing area and walkways are free of ice to prevent accidents. If drive-up testing is used, remove ice from vehicle lanes.
- Dehydration can occur quickly in winter months. Provide plenty of water to avoid dehydration and warm beverages if possible.
- Design staff and shift rotations around the need to rotate employees more frequently, allowing staff the chance to regularly move into an indoor heated space to stay warm

Establish recommendations for healthcare workers' clothing during times of prolonged cold exposure, based on temperature and weather conditions.

Depending on the temperature, wind, and precipitation they may need:

- **Wool base layer (or other fabric material that stays warm while wet)**
- **Exterior layer that blocks wind, such as a winter jacket with a hood**
- **Winter boots with tread designed for walking on icy or slick surfaces**
- **Gear to keep neck, head, and extremities warm (hat, socks, mittens or gloves, and scarf)**
- **Portable warming gear, such as hand and foot warming packets**

Modes of large-scale community testing

- Drive through testing. This type of testing allows the patient to remain in his/her vehicle while healthcare workers gather the swab for analysis.
- Clinic testing (by appointment or walk-in hours, contact individual clinic for details). Clinics or central testing sites (such as convention centers or other large buildings in central locations) can provide testing. If testing demand is high, consider requiring an appointment to avoid too many people coming to the test location at the same time. If demand for testing is manageable, walk-in hours may be more convenient.
- Testing blitz days. Schedule days of large-scale testing when a high number of staff, contact tracers, and healthcare workers can be available to test a large number of people. Providing free testing during these events can increase the number of individuals tested. Organization prior to the start of the event and clear directions for patients are important to ensure that the testing site still allows for 6 feet of separation between individuals and does not become overcrowded.
- Home testing through the use of test kits (saliva or nasal swab). Test kits can be provided at a clinic or distributed through the mail. Instructions are provided on the kits for sending the samples to labs or clinics for analysis, or local hospitals can arrange for safe pick-up of the kits from the patient's home.

