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Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

COVID-19 Virus and Testing

Q: Does The Path Lab offer COVID-19 PCR testing?

A: Yes. The Path lab offers molecular testing on THREE platforms. The Hologic Panther offers NAAT testing and the BD Max and Thermofisher Quantstudio 5 offer PCR testing. Patient fact sheets are available on our website at www.thepathlab.com under the News & Events tab.

Q: I don't feel well. Should I be tested for COVID-19?

A: You should contact your healthcare provider for guidance.

A: If you do not have a primary healthcare provider you may order a test on yourself. First evaluate your exposure. Have you been around people who could have exposed you? If you live alone, and are not exposed to people, you may not have been exposed. Read exposure guidelines below.

Q: I have been exposed. Should I be tested for COVID-19? Do I need to quarantine?

A: Testing may not be necessary. It takes time for the virus to build up in your body. If you were within 6 feet of a positive COVID-19 patient for more than 15 minutes in a 24 hour period, you should quarantine for 14 days since symptoms may appear 2-14 days after being exposed. Consult with your physician for testing guidance.

Note: Options to decrease quarantine are offered by the CDC. *When diagnostic testing resources are sufficient and available*, then quarantine can end after Day 7 if a diagnostic specimen tests negative and if no symptoms were reported during daily monitoring. The specimen may be collected and tested within 48 hours before the time of planned quarantine discontinuation (e.g., in anticipation of testing delays), but quarantine cannot be discontinued earlier than after Day 7.

**Criteria presented above using information from the CDC (last updated December 2, 2020).*

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/more/scientific-brief-options-to-reduce-quarantine.html>

Q: I am having surgery. Do I need a COVID-19 PCR test?

A: It depends on what the surgery center requires. Consult with your physician and/or surgery center for testing guidance.

Q: Can I have COVID-19 testing performed without a doctor's order?

A: Yes. The COVID-19 test may be ordered as Direct to Consumer testing. The cost for testing is \$75.

If you do NOT have insurance, the government and Medicare will cover the cost.

If you do have insurance, we recommend you obtain a doctor's order to avoid paying the \$75 fee.

Q: I need results today. Is your COVID-19 test a rapid test?

A: No. It is NOT a rapid test. It may take up to 48 hours for The Path Lab to report a COVID-19 test result.
Note: *As of September 28, 2020, we are currently testing all COVID-19 specimens in-house.*

Q: How do I get my test results for COVID-19 antibody or PCR?

A: Results may be picked up from The Path Lab once they have been reported. Please do not contact us until 48 hours after collection. Results may be picked up 8:00 am - 4:00 pm Monday - Friday and 8:00 am - 10:30 am Saturday.

Q: What is the turnaround time (TAT) for a COVID-19 PCR test?

A: If performed in-house, TAT is up to 48 hours. If sent out to a reference lab, TAT is up to 7 days.
Note: *As of September 28, 2020, we are currently testing all COVID-19 specimens in-house.*

Q: What is the turnaround time (TAT) for a COVID-19 antibody test?

A: Testing is performed in-house and may take up to 48 hours to report.

Q: Should I have the COVID-19 PCR or antibody test performed?

A: It depends on if you are looking for current or past infection. **Current infection** should be diagnosed using the *PCR* test. **Past infection** may be determined using the *antibody* test.

Note: *Antibody testing will not be positive for at least 2 weeks after initial infection; therefore, antibody testing should not be used for return to work or pre-surgery reasons. Positive antibody testing only shows that you have likely had COVID-19 in the past, and does not confer immunity from future infections. It is possible to get COVID-19 more than once.*

Q: Which COVID-19 antibody test should I order?

A: It depends on if you are looking for natural response or vaccinated response.

Vaccinated response or Natural response - This test is looking for an antibody response to the (S) Spike protein. This test should be requested at least 2 weeks after second vaccination or exposure to COVID-19.

Natural response - This test is looking for an antibody response to the (N) Nucleocapsid protein. This test should not be ordered until 2 weeks after initial infection.

The Pathology lab is able to collect for both of these tests. **Note:** *It is important to indicate which test is needed at time of collection.*

Q: What does a positive COVID-19 PCR or antibody test result mean?

A: A **positive PCR** test result while symptomatic means you are currently infected with COVID-19. Follow your physician's directions and/or current quarantine guidelines. While it is possible for you to infect others, it does not mean that you need to be hospitalized. **Note:** *You may be positive by PCR for 4-5 weeks, but you are no longer infectious after 10 days symptom free from first day of symptoms.*

A **positive antibody** test result means you have been vaccinated and or previously have had a coronavirus infection. You likely cannot infect others unless you have contracted COVID-19 infection again. **Note:** *There is some cross reactivity for other coronaviruses in the antibody test, so a positive result is possible from other coronavirus past infections.*

The Path Lab offers two antibody tests.

Test code 8706, Total qualitative antibody will be positive if you have been exposed to Covid-19 naturally. If you have been vaccinated, this test will be NEGATIVE.

Test code 8707, S (Spike) Total semiquantitative antibody will be positive if you have been exposed naturally or if you have been vaccinated.

Patient Fact sheets for the tests performed by Path Lab are located on our website at www.thepathlab.com, under the News and Events Tab.

Q: Does a negative test result mean that I don't have COVID-19?

A: Not necessarily. For the *PCR* test, you must a high enough viral load built up in your body to get a positive result. So if you test too soon in the course of the infection, the test result may be negative even though you have *current* infection. Likewise, if you have the *antibody* test performed before your body develops antibodies, the test result may be negative even though you've had *past* infection.

Q: Does a positive *antibody* test result mean I am immune from future COVID-19 infections?

A: Not necessarily. The body can make different types of antibodies, some of which confer immunity and some of which do not. Current testing does not distinguish the type of antibody you make. So even if you make antibodies, you may not be immune to future infections. Furthermore, it is not known how long the antibodies last in your body, but the current theory is approximately 2-3 months. Just because you've had COVID-19 infection does not mean you cannot get it again.

Q: If my COVID-19 *PCR* test result is positive, how long must I quarantine/isolate from work?

A: If you tested **positive** and **symptomatic**, you should not return to work until at least 10 days have passed since symptoms first appeared, **and** at least 24 hours fever-free without fever-reducing medication, **and** other symptoms have improved. **Please note:**

- *Loss of taste and smell may persist for weeks or months after recovery, and need not delay the end of isolation.*
- *If you had severe illness and were hospitalized, your healthcare provider may recommend you stay in isolation for longer than 10 days after symptoms first appeared.*
- *Your healthcare provider may recommend repeat testing for COVID-19 to end your isolation earlier than stated in the criteria above. If so, you can return to work after you receive two negative test results in a row done at least 24 hours apart.**

If you tested **positive** with **no symptoms**, you should not return to work until at least 10 days have passed since the date of your positive test.*

**Criteria presented above using information from the CDC (last updated August 12, 2020).*

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/isolation.html>

Q: Is there a free mobile testing site?

A: Yes, located at the Calcasieu Parish Health Unit at 3236 Kirkman St in Lake Charles, LA. Please call them for dates and hours of operation at 337-478-6020.

Q: My retest result is not the same as my initial test result. How can this happen?

A: It is possible to receive both a positive and negative test on the same day. Yes, it is possible.

We do not recommend retesting on the same day. With each test method and instrumentation, targets and viral loads are measured. As time passes, the virus increases or decreases depending on your exposure and testing date. We recommend at least 72 hours before retesting.

Last updated: February 5, 2021
March 1, 2021

Content Sources:

1. CDC Coronavirus (COVID-19) <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>
2. Louisiana Department of Public Health Coronavirus COVID-19 <https://ldh.la.gov/coronavirus/>