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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.

Consult with your physician for testing guidance. **Regardless of vaccination status**, the CDC has shortened the recommended time for **isolation** from 10 days for people with COVID-19 to 5 days, if asymptomatic, followed by 5 days of wearing a mask when around others. Reason being that the majority of SARS-CoV-2 transmission occurs early in the course of illness, generally in the 1-2 days prior to onset of symptoms and the 2-3 days after. Therefore, people who test positive should isolate for 5 days and, if asymptomatic at that time, they may end isolation if they can continue to wear a mask for 5 days to minimize the risk of infecting others.

Additionally, the CDC has updated the recommended **quarantine** period for those exposed to COVID-19. For people who are unvaccinated or are more than 6 months out from their second mRNA dose (or more than 2 months after the J&J vaccine) and not yet boosted, CDC recommends quarantine for 5 days followed by strict mask use for an additional 5 days. If a 5-day quarantine is not feasible, the exposed individual should wear a well-fitted mask at all times when around others for 10 days after exposure. Individuals who have received their booster shot do not need to quarantine following an exposure, but should wear a mask for 10 days after the exposure. For all those exposed, the best practice is to test for SARS-CoV-2 at day 5 after exposure. If symptoms occur, individuals should immediately quarantine until a negative test confirms symptoms are not from COVID-19.

Note: Isolation relates to behavior after a confirmed infection. **Quarantine** relates to the time following an exposure to the virus or close contact with someone known to have COVID-19. A **direct exposure** is considered having direct contact with someone who has COVID-19. Examples of direct

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contact include: hugged/kissed, shared eating/drinking utensils, sneezed/coughed on, or provided care to person with COVID-19.

**Criteria presented above using information from the CDC (last updated December 27, 2021).*

<https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2021/s1227-isolation-quarantine-guidance.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 Monday-Friday between 8:00am and 4:00pm and on Saturday between 8:00 am and 10:30 am.

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. Same day TAT is offered as long as the specimen is collected at the main lab by 10:00am. A STAT fee of \$25 will be charged. **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 or have been vaccinated, 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 a *natural* or *vaccinated* response. The Path Lab now offers two COVID-19 antibody tests and is able to collect for both. **Note:** *It is important to indicate which test is needed at time of collection. If unsure, request both tests to be performed.*

- **Total Quantitative SARS-CoV-2 Antibody – Natural Response (8706).** This test is looking for an antibody response to the (N) Nucleocapsid protein. This test should not be ordered until at least 2 weeks after initial infection.

- **Total Semiquantitative SARS-CoV-2 Spike (S) Protein Antibody – Vaccinated or Natural Response (8707).** 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.

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.*

- **Total Qualitative Antibody (8706)** will be positive if you have been exposed to COVID-19 naturally. If you have been vaccinated, this test will be NEGATIVE.
- **Spike (S) Protein Total Semiquantitative Antibody (8707)** will be positive if you have been exposed naturally or if you have been vaccinated.

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

Q: How long do my antibodies last and what should my “level” be to confer immunity?

A: It is not known how long the antibodies last in your body, but the current theory is approximately 6-9 months. As of 8/19/2021, the CDC has not provided a value that determines a patient’s immune status.

Q: My COVID-19 PCR 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 result on the same day; therefore, we do not recommend retesting on the same day. Targets and viral loads are measured with each test method and instrumentation, and as time passes, the virus increases or decreases depending on your exposure and testing date. **We recommend waiting at least 72 hours before retesting.**

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

A: Not necessarily. For the PCR test, you must have 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 6-9 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 stay home and isolate for 5 days. Wear a well

Fitted mask if you must be around others in your home. End isolation after 5 full days if you are fever free for 24 hours (without the use of fever-reducing medication) and your symptoms are improving. Take precautions until day 10. Wear a well-fitted mask for 10 full days any time you are around others inside your home or in public. Do not go to places where you are unable to wear a mask.

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.**

Q: Is there a free mobile testing site?

A: Yes, located at the Calcasieu Parish Health Unit and Lake Charles Memorial Hospital ER (parking lot). Please call them for dates and hours of operation.

Calcasieu Parish Health Unit

3236 Kirkman St, Lake Charles, LA 70601
337-478-6020

Lake Charles Memorial Hospital ER (parking lot)

1701 Oak Park Blvd, Lake Charles, LA 70601
337-494-3000

Q: Do I need to wear a mask?

A: CDC recommends universal indoor masking for anyone 2 years and older. They also recommend for fully vaccinated people to wear a mask in public indoor settings in areas of substantial or high transmission.*

**Criteria presented above using information from the CDC (last updated October 25, 2021).*

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/about-face-coverings.html>

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Content Sources:

1. CDC Coronavirus (COVID-19) <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>