

ANTIBODY TESTING – COVID-19

PATIENT INFORMATION LEAFLET

What is an antibody test?

An antibody test can tell someone whether they have had the virus that causes COVID-19 in the past, by analysing a blood sample.

What do antibody test results mean?

A positive antibody test demonstrates that someone has developed antibodies to the virus. The presence of antibodies signals that the body has staged an immune response to the virus.

COVID-19 is a new disease, and our understanding of the body's immune response to it is limited. We do not know, for example, how long an antibody response lasts, nor whether having antibodies means you can't transmit the virus to others.

Our understanding of the virus will grow as new scientific evidence and studies emerge.

An antibody test result can only tell an individual whether or not they have had the virus in the past. Antibody tests are also being used currently in surveillance studies, to understand what proportion of the population have already had the virus.

If you test positive for antibodies, can you ignore lockdown restrictions?

No. There is no evidence yet to suggest that those who have been proven to have had the virus are immune. This is the position of the World Health Organisation.

You should continue to comply with social distancing measures and government guidelines. All infection prevention and control measures must continue to be in place irrespective of the presence of antibodies.

How will I be informed of the result?

Communication of this result will be sent via text to the mobile number that is held on our records. If you do not have a mobile phone you will need to ring us to find out the results. It is only the result of the antibody test that will be sent via text you will still need to contact us with regards to the results of any other tests that you are having.

How will my information be used?

The anonymised results across the testing programme will provide information on the prevalence of COVID-19 in different regions of the country and help better understand how the disease spreads.

Please note, that in line with national guidance, test samples may be stored for a year or more. They may be used as part of further research or to help establish other tests in the future.

Are there any risks to having the test?

There are some risks related to having a blood test, such as feeling dizzy and faint during and after the test but nothing specific to this antibody test. Risks can also include bruising at the venepuncture site. Serious complications such as an infection at the site where blood was taken and phlebitis (swelling of the vein) are possible but generally extremely unlikely.

Frequently Asked Questions for staff COVID-19 antibody testing

Below are some answers to frequently asked questions about the testing. These explain more about the tests, how you will receive your results, and what each result means.

1. What is an antibody?

Antibodies are proteins that are produced by the body in response to infections, including viruses such as SARS-CoV-2 (the cause of COVID-19). Antibodies can be produced in response to the virus itself (i.e. when the virus enters your body) or in response to vaccination.

2. What is the COVID-19 antibody test?

The COVID-19 antibody test is a blood test which detects specific antibodies called SARSCoV-2 IgG. A sample of blood is taken from a vein from your inner elbow as with other basic blood tests.

3. What is the reason for having an antibody test?

The antibody test for COVID-19 is very accurate in determining if there is evidence of past infection in your blood.

When antibodies are detected it almost certainly means you have been infected with the virus. However, there is not currently enough evidence to confirm whether having antibodies against COVID-19 will protect you against the infection in the future.

In some other infections, the presence of antibodies can provide a degree of protection. Therefore, there is a possibility that people who have COVID-19 antibodies may have some level of immunity, but it is not clear to what extent and for how long.

It is therefore crucial that you strictly follow the current Government guidance regarding hand hygiene and maintain social distancing and any other measures that the Government currently recommends, regardless of your antibody results.

4. How will I receive my test results?

The results of the tests will be sent to you by text. If you do not have a mobile number then you will need to contact us to request the results of your test. The quickest way to receive your results is via text.

5. I have received my COVID-19 antibody results and it says I have tested 'positive'. What does this mean?

It means that antibodies against the virus are present in your blood. It confirms that you have been infected with COVID-19 at some point in the past.

6. I have received my COVID-19 antibody results and it says I have tested 'positive'. Does it mean I am immune?

We do not know whether having antibodies against COVID-19 will protect you against the infection in the future.

We do know that in some other infections, the presence of antibodies can provide a degree of protection. Therefore, people who have COVID-19 antibodies may have some level of immunity but it is not clear to what extent or for how long.

It is therefore crucial that you strictly follow the Governments current Covid-19 advice regardless of your antibody results.

If you become unwell again with COVID-19 symptoms, you should self-isolate and arrange to be tested in accordance with current Government advice.

7. I have received my COVID-19 antibody results and it says I have tested 'positive' but I have not had fever or persistent cough since January. Is the test accurate?

The COVID-19 antibody test is extremely accurate. When antibodies are detected it almost certainly means you have had the infection. However, a large proportion of people only have

minor symptoms so you might not have noticed them at the time. Some people will have had no symptoms at all.

8. I have received my COVID-19 antibody results and it says I have tested 'positive'. Do I need to self-isolate?

No, you do not need to self-isolate. Having the antibodies does not mean you have a current infection, or the ability to infect other people.

However, regardless of your antibody results, you will need to self-isolate if:

- You are currently symptomatic
- You develop symptoms in the future
- You have had a nose and throat swab during the past seven days and the swab was reported positive.

9. I have received my COVID-19 antibody results and it says I have tested 'negative'. What does this mean?

This result means that evidence of prior COVID-19 infection was not found in your blood.

Most likely you have not had the infection, but it can take some time for antibodies to develop. Also, some people, especially those with mild infections, do not develop antibodies or only at low levels, that do not last long.

10. I have received my COVID-19 antibody results and it says I have tested 'negative'. Does this mean that I am not immune and therefore should stay at home?

There is not currently enough evidence to confirm whether having antibodies against COVID-19 will protect you against the infection. Therefore, there is still a risk of infection with COVID-19.

You do not need to stay at home but it is vital that you strictly follow the Governments latest Covid-19 guidance, regardless of your antibody results.