

COVID-19 Testing Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

What are the types of tests for COVID-19?

There are two types of testing for COVID-19:

1. **Diagnostic Testing** (via nose swab). This is often referred to as “COVID-19 PCR” test or “PCR” for short. This test should be done in anyone who has symptoms of COVID-19. At the present time, all diagnostic tests are done by a medical professional by taking a small amount of nasal aspirate with a nose swab. Testing criteria are constantly changing and so it is important to medically evaluate all potential symptoms for COVID-19 before testing. MUSC Health recommends doing this through the MUSC Health [Virtual Urgent Care](#) (VUC) telehealth platform; this is a safe at-home method of obtaining information to determine if testing is needed.
2. **Antibody Testing** (currently via a blood sample, ultimately saliva and urine testing should be possible). This is often referred to as a serology test, immunity test, or immune test. It determines whether you have developed antibodies as a result of exposure to Sars-CoV2, which is the virus that causes COVID-19.

I have been given the option to get an antibody (blood) test for COVID-19? Should I do this?

Antibody testing for COVID-19 is in its early phases. Over 75 companies have developed these tests and more are coming on the market every day. There is no perfect test, but MUSC Health is committed to offering the best available tests for our staff and community. As MUSC Health validates and makes COVID-19 antibody testing available, it is important to make sure you understand what the test results mean.

MUSC Health is offering antibody tests in order to help you better understand your current status as it relates to COVID-19, and gain insight into the prevalence of this virus in our community. Antibody tests will continue to improve in the next several months however we do recommend that knowing your current status is helpful in the COVID-19 recovery process as long as you fully understand the current limitations of the currently available tests. MUSC Health currently recommends the Abbott ARCHITECT SARS-CoV-2 IgG Antibody Test.

Science has not fully established the relationship between presence of COVID-19 antibodies and the timing, depth, and duration of COVID19 immunity. This will be better known in the next 6-12 months; however, we do have knowledge based on some small studies of similar viruses that we can make some early determinations.

The currently available antibody tests have these limitations:

- *The Abbott ARCHITECT SARS-CoV-2 IgG Antibody Test has been validated by MUSC labs to have a 96% sensitivity and 99% specificity. A positive result means that there is a 99% chance that you have had a previous COVID-19 infection.*
- *Positive results do not establish proof of long-lasting immunity for any future COVID-19 infection. It is likely that you have some immunity. We do not yet know the level of immunity given the presence of antibodies. We also do not know how individual characteristics might influence this immunity.*
- *Therefore, positive results should **NOT** be considered as a way to know that you are perfectly safe without protecting yourself from COVID-19 (at work or home)*

I had a negative test for COVID-19 while I was sick. Can an antibody test help show if this was a false-negative?

It depends. If the MUSC Health approved antibody test is negative, then you probably did not have COVID-19 illness. The timing of the antibody test is important, and you should discuss this with your primary care provider.

If the antibody test has all these limitations, why do it at all?

For populations, the test is very useful to measure how much COVID-19 is occurring locally by comparing how many people have antibodies now versus later, as COVID-19 becomes more common in South Carolina. For individuals, it is difficult to make firm conclusions and work-home decisions, based on a single antibody test. However, it is important to start testing now, knowing that tests will improve over time. In addition, our knowledge will improve on which antibodies protect people from getting COVID-19, and how long these antibodies are likely to last in the body. Additionally, as we are able to document who has had prior exposure to COVID-19 we will be able to understand whether individuals are at risk for developing a second infection and its severity.

I had a positive diagnostic (PCR) test for COVID-19 earlier this year. Am I immune to COVID-19?

Probably, at least for some period of time. This is based on prior studies of common cold viruses where volunteers are deliberately infected with coronavirus cold viruses, producing symptoms of a common cold. In past studies, the same volunteers would be “re-challenged” with the same viruses. In some studies, the volunteers who were re-challenged one year after infection did not develop colds, but in others mild symptoms of varying degrees still developed. However, we do not have any good data about the length of immunity to the COVID-19 will last.

I had a positive diagnostic (PCR) test for COVID-19 earlier this year, and now I have a positive antibody test. Am I immune to COVID-19?

If you obtained the most current MUSC Health recommended test, you are probably immune to some degree. However, we do not know the exact time, depth, and duration of this immunity.

How can you have a positive antibody to an infectious disease and still get that disease?

Antibodies that the body makes against an infection do not always protect you from that infection. A good example of this is HIV infection. In some infectious diseases, antibodies that bind the virus, but do not neutralize it, can actually make the infection worse.

If I didn't have a known/documentated COVID-19 infection, does a positive antibody test mean that I had an asymptomatic case of COVID-19 earlier?

Possibly, however asymptomatic COVID-19 infections are uncommon (1-4% of all infections). People often underestimate their symptoms. If you obtained the most current MUSC Health recommended test, the chance of a positive test being related to other coronaviruses is unlikely. A positive test is likely indicative of a minimally symptomatic COVID-19 infection.

Are there better antibody tests in development?

Yes, and MUSC Health will continue to monitor the development and release of these tests. We will continue to only recommend the best available tests. Future tests will be more specific to COVID-19, indicate the amount of antibody present, and better correlate protection from infection. This will increase confidence in the test results and better inform individual decisions about work and home life.

What if I need additional help understanding my results?

If you need help interpreting the results of the test and would like to speak to a primary care provider, you can schedule an appointment by calling MUSC Health Primary Care at (843) 792-7000.

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