



COVID-19 Testing Clarification

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IRMA has received inquiries regarding the types of COVID-19 tests currently available and which is best. While testing decisions must be made on an individual basis and in conjunction with an employee's healthcare provider, IRMA has compiled information available through the FDA, IDPH, and the CDC to assist employers in understanding the differences between the tests currently available. This information should be used in the spirit of directing employees, based on their individual scenario and test results, to the most correct course of action, i.e., to quarantine, to isolate, or to return to work in order to reduce virus spread in the workplace and to more expediently manage of positive cases.

Based on the information in the table provided by the FDA, IRMA offers the following guidelines for deciding which type of test should be sought out under certain scenarios:

1. If an employee's COVID-19 symptoms are obvious; send for a rapid test to confirm and start isolation protocols.
2. If an employee exposure occurs, but no symptoms are present, avoid a rapid test initially as it is less likely that an accurate result will occur.
 - a. Ideally, an employee in this scenario should wait until day 7 after their exposure date (under quarantine), then get a PCR test if symptoms are not present.
3. If a rapid test comes back positive, it is highly likely the employee is COVID-19 positive.
4. If a rapid test comes back negative; it is recommended that a follow up PCR test be conducted to confirm the negative result.

At this time, IDPH has not indicated that rapid testing is unreliable, but does refer to PCR testing as the "gold standard" for COVID-19 detection.

Resources:

[FDA - Testing Basics Chart](#)

[FDA - Coronavirus Testing Basics](#)

[IDPH - Provider Guidance for Testing](#)

[Harvard Health - Which Test is Best for COVID-19?](#)

[CDC - When to Quarantine](#)

[CDC - When to Isolate](#)

[CDC - When You Can Be Around Others](#)



A **diagnostic test** can show if you have an active coronavirus infection and should take steps to quarantine or isolate yourself from others. Currently there are two types of diagnostic tests – **molecular tests**, such as RT-PCR tests, that detect the virus’s genetic material, and **antigen tests** that detect specific proteins from the virus.



An **antibody test** looks for antibodies that are made by your immune system in response to a threat, such as a specific virus. Antibodies can help fight infections. Antibodies can take several days or weeks to develop after you have an infection and may stay in your blood for several weeks or more after recovery. Because of this, antibody tests should not be used to diagnose COVID-19. At this time researchers do not know if the presence of antibodies means that you are immune to COVID-19 in the future.

	MOLECULAR TEST	ANTIGEN TEST	ANTIBODY TEST
Also known as...	Diagnostic test, viral test, molecular test, nucleic acid amplification test (NAAT), RT-PCR test, LAMP test	Diagnostic test	Serological test, serology blood test, serology test
How the sample is taken...	Nasopharyngeal (the part of the throat behind the nose), nasal or throat swab (most tests) Saliva (a few tests)	Nasal or nasopharyngeal swab (most tests)	Finger stick or blood draw
How long it takes to get results...	Same day (some locations) or up to a week (longer in some locations with many tests)	Some may be very fast (15 – 30 minutes), depending on the test	Same day (many locations) or 1-3 days
Is another test needed...	This test is typically highly accurate and usually does not need to be repeated.	Positive results are usually highly accurate, but false positives can happen, especially in areas where very few people have the virus. Negative results may need to be confirmed with a molecular test.	Sometimes a second antibody test is needed for accurate results.
What it shows...	Diagnoses active coronavirus infection	Diagnoses active coronavirus infection	Shows if you’ve been infected by coronavirus in the past
What it can’t do...	Show if you ever had COVID-19 or were infected with the virus that causes COVID-19 in the past	Antigen tests are more likely to miss an active COVID-19 infection compared to molecular tests. Your health care provider may order a molecular test if your antigen test shows a negative result but you have symptoms of COVID-19.	Diagnose COVID-19 at the time of the test or show that you do not have COVID-19.