Newton Health & Human Services Guide to Home Antigen Tests for COVID-19

COVID-19 vaccination is the best way to protect yourself and others from COVID-19. Testing should be used as part of a layered risk reduction strategy along with vaccination, wearing a mask, staying home when sick, and avoiding crowds.

PCR tests are the gold standard for diagnosing a current COVID-19 infection, but home antigen tests can be useful in certain circumstances because they are less expensive, available in pharmacy/retail locations, and you can get the results quicker than laboratory-based PCR tests. Consult your health care provider if you have questions about your individual situation.

When to use a home antigen test

- If you have COVID-19 symptoms:
    - Your symptoms just started (or started recently) and you can't access a PCR test and/or need immediate results
- If you do not have COVID-19 symptoms:
    - You were identified as a close contact of someone with COVID-19 and you can't access a PCR test and/or need immediate results. **Test no earlier than three days after exposure and ideally around five days after exposure.**
    - You are attending an event or gathering where physical distancing will be difficult or where others in attendance may be at high risk. **Test on the day of the event.**
    - You participated in a higher risk activity where physical distancing was not possible (e.g., travel, attending a large social gathering, being in a crowded indoor or poorly ventilated space for more than 15 minutes). **Test no earlier than three days after the activity and ideally around five days after the activity.**

Things to remember

- Results from any type of COVID-19 test only show your status at the time the test is taken and could change if you are tested again in one or more days, especially if you develop symptoms.
- Accuracy of home antigen test results:
    - A positive test most likely indicates a true COVID-19 infection and generally means that the person is contagious.
    - Antigen tests are most accurate in symptomatic people who are in the early stages of infection (symptoms started recently). If you do not have symptoms and get a positive result, you can choose to confirm the result with a PCR test. Isolate at home while waiting for test results.
- Results from a home antigen test may not be accepted for things such as air travel and return to school. Be sure to check with your airline, school, etc. about their specific requirements.
- Only proctored home tests (done under the supervision of a health care worker during a telehealth visit) can be used for the CDC's testing requirement for international travel. Different countries may have different rules about which tests are acceptable and when they need to be done. Be sure to check the requirements for your destination.
- Carefully follow the manufacturer's instructions for when to use the test and how to conduct the test.

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Summary of how to interpret test results

	Symptomatic ***(test as close to start of symptoms as possible, follow manufacturer's instructions)***	**Close contact without symptoms**	**Person with no symptoms and no known exposure**
Positive	Currently infected with COVID-19, isolate at home	Currently infected with COVID-19, isolate (you may confirm with a PCR test* and isolate while awaiting test results)	Presumed to be currently infected with COVID-19, isolate (you may confirm with a PCR test* and isolate while awaiting test results)
Negative	Confirm with a PCR test*, isolate while awaiting test result	No current evidence of infection. If fully vaccinated, no need to quarantine. If not fully vaccinated, quarantine according to DPH guidance.	Not infected, continue to follow usual precautions

*If the PCR test is done within two days of the antigen test and the results don't match, use the result of the PCR test.

Sources

https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/lab/resources/antigen-tests-guidelines.html

https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/testing-overview.html

https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/lab/resources/Antigen_Testing_Algorithm_2020-12-14_v03_NO_DRAFT_SPW_508.pdf#Interpreting-Results-of-Diagnostic-Tests