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Guidance

Coronavirus (COVID-19): antibody testing

Updated 22 August 2021

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This publication is available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-antibody-tests/coronavirus-covid-19-antibody-tests>

Applies to: England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

This guidance does not apply to people taking part in antibody research studies. If you're part of a study, use the guidance given to you. For help, contact your research study co-ordinator.

Antibody testing

An antibody test is a blood test to check if you've had coronavirus (COVID-19) before or been vaccinated.

The NHS and scientists can use this information to improve their understanding of how the body reacts to the virus and how it spreads.

The test detects your body's response to the virus or vaccination but cannot tell you if you currently have COVID-19.

Find out about the different types of coronavirus (COVID-19) tests you can get to check if you have the virus on NHS.UK (<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/testing/get-tested-for-coronavirus/>).

Who can get an antibody test kit

Tests are only available to certain groups.

Antibody test kits: check you're eligible and register for a kit (<https://www.gov.uk/register-coronavirus-antibody-test>)

People booking a PCR test for COVID-19 will also be given the option to take part in antibody testing.

You can still get an antibody test if you've had the COVID-19 vaccine.

What your antibody test result means

If you're part of an antibody research study, this information may not be right for you. Always use the guidance provided by the study to find out what your result means.

You should get your result within 3 to 7 days of taking the test (usually by text or email).

There are different types of antibody tests. Make sure you check the message you receive to help you understand what your result means.

Positive antibody test result

A positive result means the test did detect COVID-19 antibodies.

Antibodies for COVID-19 mean you are likely to have some protection from severe disease, but it's still possible to get the virus or spread it.

Negative antibody test result

A negative result means the test did not detect COVID-19 antibodies.

Antibodies take time to develop. Most people make antibodies within 28 days of being infected or vaccinated, but it can take longer.

The test you get after a positive PCR test can detect antibodies made after vaccination or infection but other tests will only look for antibodies made after you have had the virus.

Void antibody test result

A void result means the test did not work.

This could be because there was a problem with the test kit or because the blood sample was too small.

It's still important to record a void result for research purposes.

After you get your result

Regardless of your antibody test result you must continue to follow the same guidelines as everyone else to protect yourself and others from the virus.

Get the latest advice on how to protect yourself and others from the virus (<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>).

If you think your result is wrong

The test is accurate but no at-home test is 100% reliable all of the time.

COVID-19 is new and more research needs to be done to understand how our bodies respond to it. For example, we need to find out if antibodies are always produced and how long they last.

If you have any concerns about your test result, call 119 (free from mobiles and landlines).

Lines are open every day, 7am to 11pm. 119 provides support in 200 languages.

InterpreterNow (<https://interpreternow.co.uk/nhs119>) is a free online British Sign Language interpreter service for 119.

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