

COVID-19 Testing

General COVID Testing Information

Coronavirus disease 2019, or COVID-19, is a new respiratory illness that can spread from person to person. People of all ages can get sick with COVID-19 and it's important for everyone to take special precautions. Most cases of COVID-19 result in mild illness. To date, children also seem less likely to become ill. But people who are older or those who have other health conditions are more likely to have serious illness. Those at higher risk include:

- People over 60 years of age. The risk increases significantly thereafter and escalates with age, with persons over age 80 in the highest risk category.
- People who live in a nursing home or long-term care facility.
- People, regardless of age, with underlying health conditions, including heart disease, diabetes, severe obesity, chronic kidney disease, chronic lung diseases or asthma, as well as those with severely weakened immune systems.

Call your doctor's office if you are at higher risk and ask if you need to be evaluated in person. They may want to monitor your health more closely or test you for COVID-19.

Not everyone needs to be tested for COVID-19. Most people have mild illness and are able to recover at home. There is no special treatment for COVID-19 and even if you get tested, you will receive the same medical advice. The best thing you can do to protect yourself and others in your community is to stay home while you have mild symptoms.

Testing is done by health care providers who evaluate patients individually and decide whether testing is needed. The CDPH COVID-19 hotline does not assist residents with getting tested and does not make decisions about who should be tested. Please do not contact the COVID-19 hotline for issues related to COVID-19 testing.

For additional information, please see the "[When to get tested](#)" section of chicago.gov/coronavirus.

Types of COVID-19 Tests

The most common types of COVID-19 test are a molecular (PCR) test and serology (antibody) test.

- A PCR test shows whether the virus is present in the body and is typically done through nasal or throat swab.
- A serology test is a blood antibody test that shows if you have antibodies against COVID-19 and if you're immune to the virus, whether you developed any symptoms or not. At this time, the FDA has issued emergency use authorization (EUA) for three COVID-19 antibody tests and none have been validated for diagnosis. Antibody tests currently on the market might not be reliable and test results must be interpreted with caution. **At this time, antibody testing results, alone, are not sufficient to make a clinical diagnosis of COVID-19, nor to rule out infection.**

This version was released on 04/16/2020. It may be updated with new guidance.

Please visit www.chicago.gov/coronavirus to find the latest version.

Ways to get tested for COVID-19

Testing is only recommended for people with symptoms of COVID-19. If you have symptoms and are in one of the high risk groups, call your healthcare provider to see whether they recommend you be tested for COVID-19. If your healthcare provider recommends testing but cannot perform it at their office, they might be able to refer you to another location such as an urgent care facility. While emergency departments can do testing, we recommend that you only go there if it's an emergency. If you don't have a health care provider or medical insurance, there are approximately 165 [community health centers](#) throughout Chicago, so find one that is close to you at findahealthcenter.hrsa.gov. Call ahead and they will work with you to coordinate appropriate care.

If your doctor recommends you be tested for COVID-19, they will likely take a swab of your nose or throat (for the PCR test) and/or take a small blood sample (serology test). These samples are then sent to a public health, clinical or commercial laboratory for analysis. Turnaround time for results can be as short as the same day or as long as 10 days, depending on the brand of test and the laboratory used. The Chicago Department of Public Health does not have a laboratory and therefore cannot provide you with your test results.

Drive-Up Testing Sites

Some doctors have developed systems to evaluate patients and to provide testing for those at higher risk without having people leave their cars such as telehealth consults and drive-thru test sites. These sites may be run by the state or federal government, or by private companies. CDPH does not perform COVID-19 testing and therefore does not run any drive-thru test sites. Call your doctor or pharmacy to learn more about these services.

To get your test results, call the health care provider who performed your test. If your test was performed at a drive-thru clinic, then you should receive a phone call with your results, but you may also be able to check them by calling the laboratory that performed the test or through the laboratory's patient portal. Please note that turnaround times for testing results can be as long as 3-10 days.

Test Results

Molecular (PCR) test: A PCR test is the most reliable way to determine whether you have COVID-19 or not.

- If you test positive for COVID-19, see [What to do if you're sick](#).
- If you test negative for COVID-19, you probably were not infected at the time the test was performed. However, that does not mean you will not get sick. It is possible that you could test positive later, or you could be exposed later and then develop illness.

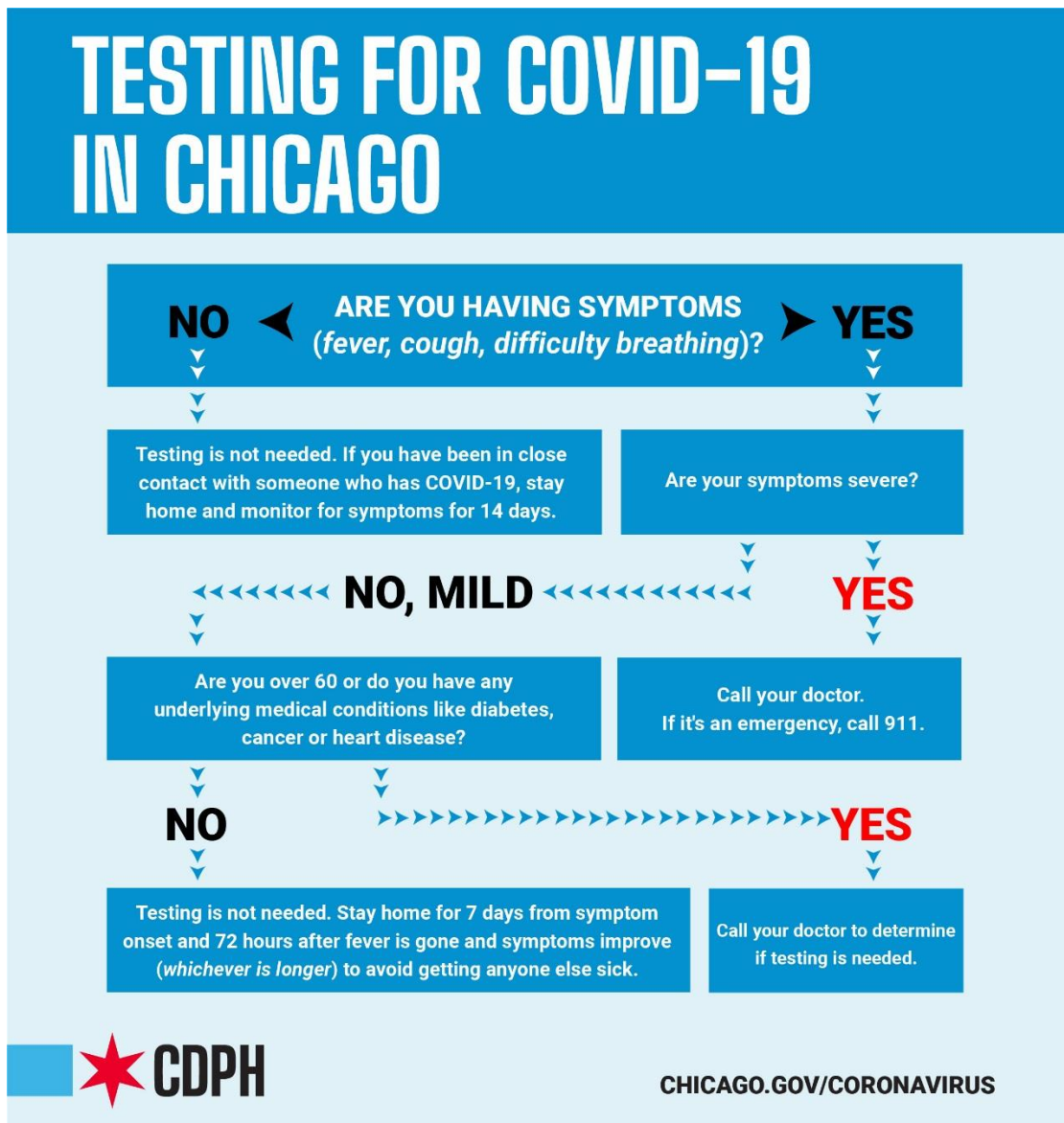
Serology (antibody) test: Please note that, at this time, the FDA has issued emergency use authorization (EUA) for three COVID-19 antibody tests and none have been validated for diagnosis. Antibody tests currently on the market might not be reliable and test results must be interpreted with caution.

- A positive antibody test might indicate past infection with COVID-19, but the result may also be because of past or present infection with other (non-COVID-19) coronavirus strains. The virus that causes COVID-19 is just one of a family of coronaviruses, and a positive antibody test may just show that someone had one of the other coronavirus strains, like the ones that can cause the common cold.

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- A positive antibody test alone, without an understanding of symptoms, exposure, and molecular (PCR) test results, is NOT sufficient to determine if someone has COVID-19 at this time.
- A positive antibody result should also NOT be used at this time to assess that a person “is immune to COVID-19”; with current technology, even if the test were fully validated, it would show that an individual has some degree of immunity. It is not known whether that is full or partial immunity, or how long immunity may last.
- If your antibody test is negative, it does not necessarily mean that you don’t have COVID-19. Your doctor may recommend that you also have a PCR test.



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