



COVID-19 Antibodies – Frequently Asked Questions

Aug 14, 2020

This series of questions and answers is written for a general public audience.

1. What do the results of an antibody test mean?
 - Positive – you were exposed to the COVID-19 virus and your body made antibodies against the virus.
 - Negative – antibodies against the COVID-19 virus were not found in your blood.
 - Inconclusive – your test result does not tell us if you have or do not have antibodies against the COVID-19 virus. This could be because you were infected with the COVID-19 virus but your body did not make a lot of antibodies or because there was a problem with the test.
2. If my COVID-19 antibody result is positive, do I need to do anything?
 - No, you don't need to do anything. A positive result tells you about an infection that happened in the past. It does not mean you are currently infected. If you have symptoms and think that you have an infection now, please check the COVID-19 Self-Assessment Tool or contact 8-1-1 for further information.
3. How accurate is the test?
 - From our experience with the tests so far, positive results are correct approximately 95% of the time (95 out of 100 results are correct). Negative results are correct approximately 99% of the time (99 out of 100 results are correct). No laboratory test is perfect, but the BCCDC Public Health Laboratory is testing samples using a combination of different tests to try to improve accuracy.
4. What is the benefit of having antibodies to COVID-19?
 - At this time, we don't know much about the benefits of having antibodies to COVID-19. We are not sure for how long the antibodies last or if they provide protection against future COVID-19 infections. More research is being done around the world, including here in B.C., to try to answer these questions. Even if you have antibodies to COVID-19, at the present time it does not mean that you are protected from being infected again; therefore, you should still follow all recommendations from Public Health on how to keep yourself and others safe.
5. If I have antibodies can I get COVID-19 again?
 - We don't know yet. Research studies in B.C. and Canada are trying to understand whether people with antibodies to COVID-19 can get re-infected or can infect others. We know that for some infections, having antibodies protects people from getting the infection again and that for other infections, it doesn't.



6. Should I have another COVID-19 antibody test sometime in the future?

- At this time, we don't have recommendations for getting tested for COVID-19 antibodies on a regular basis. However, this may change as we learn more about the virus.

7. Why do some people in my household have a positive test and others have a negative test?

- Some people in a household can get sick while others do not. This is because some people are more likely to be infected. This could be because of how much virus they were exposed to, their age or if they have any other health problems.
- Also, people who are infected make different amounts of antibodies. If a person only makes a very small amount of antibodies, the test may not be able to measure it.

8. Does the test work equally well in kids, adults and elderly?

- We don't know yet how well the antibody test works for children, as most studies on antibody tests have been done in adults. In general, elderly people may be less likely to produce high amounts of antibodies because their bodies don't respond to infections as actively as younger adults. This might also be true for COVID-19 antibodies.
- Research is currently happening to understand COVID-19 antibodies in young children. In the future, if research indicates the test works well, young children may also be able to get tested.

9. I have read about saliva tests and finger poke tests for antibodies. Why is BCCDC Public Health Laboratory offering a blood test?

- The accuracy of finger poke tests so far has not been shown to be as accurate as laboratory-based tests like the one BCCDC is using. Dried blood spot tests and saliva-based antibody tests are being studied.

10. What does it mean if I tested positive for COVID-19 from my nose swab test but my antibody test is negative?

- Different people produce different amounts of antibody. If you had a positive result from the swab test but a negative antibody test now, this may be because you did not produce a lot of antibodies to the infection. This does not mean that your nose swab test result was wrong.

11. What does it mean if I tested negative from the nose swab test but my antibody test is positive?

- The swab test may have been done when virus was not present in your nose or the nose swab did not get a good sample so the virus was not detected. The antibody test result shows that you were exposed to the virus and your body made antibodies. However, it does not tell you when exactly you were infected or how the virus has impacted you.

