

# A guide to self-testing for COVID-19:

Information for patients



## COVID-19 testing

Health Canada has authorized 3 types of tests:

- 1) **molecular** (often referred to as a PCR, or polymerase chain reaction, test): detects the SARS-CoV-2 RNA genome
- 2) **antigen**: detects the proteins that make up the SARS-CoV-2 virus
- 3) **serology** (often referred to as an antibody test): tells if you have antibodies to the SARS-CoV-2 virus
  - antibodies may be developed in response to a previous infection by SARS-CoV-2 virus or in response to vaccination
  - these tests cannot indicate if you have protective immunity

## Self-testing for COVID-19

Self-testing allows people to test themselves or their dependants for SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. These tests provide a snapshot of your current infection status. This guide should be read in addition to the instructions for use that are provided with the test.

Self-tests are either **antigen** or **molecular** tests that can help diagnose COVID-19. Some self-tests should only be used if you have symptoms, while others can be used with or without symptoms. In some cases, repeat serial testing may be done to increase the accuracy of the test if you do not have symptoms. Serial testing involves multiple tests performed over several days.

## How to test yourself

There are specific instructions for each type of self-test. Read the instructions that the manufacturer has provided to collect your sample and perform the test correctly.

Some things to keep in mind when using a COVID-19 self-test:

- › Practise good hand hygiene and clean any surfaces where you place the test kit or its components.
- › Do not open the test packaging until you are ready to use it.
- › Once open, do not place exposed swabs on any surfaces before or after collecting your sample.
- › Pay close attention to the instructions about eating and drinking before you do the test.
- › Gather the items you need that are not provided in the kit, such as a timer and necessary disposal materials.
- › Do not reuse swabs, reagents or other components designed to be used only once.



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## How to interpret the results

The results will be displayed either visually as coloured bands (like a pregnancy test) or by lights on a portable reader, or with the aid of a smartphone application.

Follow the instructions provided with the test to determine if your results are positive, negative or invalid.

### A positive result

A positive result means the test **detected** SARS-CoV-2 in your sample. Although you may or may not have any symptoms, it's possible that you could still spread the virus.

#### Steps to take:

- › Contact your local health authority to report a positive result and to book a lab test that will confirm the result as required.
- › Follow your local public health guidelines, especially regarding self-isolation, to limit the spread of COVID-19.
- › Contact your health care provider if your symptoms get worse.

### A negative result

A negative result means SARS-CoV-2 was **not detected** in your sample. However, this result does not rule out a SARS-CoV-2 infection.

#### Steps to take:

- › Continue to follow your local public health guidelines.
- › Talk to your health care provider if you have symptoms or suspect you have been in contact with someone who has COVID-19.
- › If applicable, follow the serial testing guidelines in the instructions if you do not have symptoms and receive a negative result.

### An invalid result

An invalid result means that the test was **unable to process your sample**. The test did not work properly. To reduce the risk of an invalid result, be sure to follow the instructions provided with your test.

#### Steps to take:

- › Get a new COVID-19 test, as self-tests can only be used once.
- › Call your local public health office if you are having trouble doing a self-test or have questions about self-testing.
- › Contact the manufacturer of the self-test to report the invalid result.
- › Follow local public health guidelines to stop the spread of COVID-19.

## How to dispose of your test

It's important to dispose of your test properly. To limit the risk to others, you should discard the used test components in accordance with federal, provincial, territorial, and local regulations.

- › Check the instructions that came with the test for details on disposal, such as removing the batteries.
- › When disposing of the test, place the components into a disposable bag to prevent someone else from coming into contact with the used device.

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## How to report your results

Once you have determined your test results, you may need to contact your local health authority:

- › <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/symptoms/provincial-territorial-resources-covid-19.html>

You can also find the most updated information on your provincial or territorial web site:

- › <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/symptoms/testing/diagnosing.html#a2>