

Frequently Asked Questions—Antibody/Serology Testing

Updated 6.1.20

Target Audience: Members

Q: What is antibody/serology testing?

A: Serology tests measure the presence of antibodies in our blood. Antibodies are made by the immune system as the body's response to a threat and can help determine if someone has been infected with COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2) in the past.

Q: How accurate are these tests?

A: There are limitations to serology testing including false positive or false negative results—even in the tests that have been authorized by the FDA. In addition, many of the tests have not been approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

Q: What are the other limitations of these tests?

A: The tests will not indicate whether an individual has an active infection of COVID-19. Additionally, as recently stated in the CDC Guidelines, the following remains uncertain:

- Whether individuals with antibodies are protected against reinfection with SARS-CoV-2;
- What level of antibodies is needed to give protection;
- The duration of any protection that might exist; and
- Whether the presence of antibodies means the person can't still transmit the virus, as it is common for people who do not have any symptoms to spread the virus to others.

Q: Can antibody testing be used to make the diagnosis of COVID-19?

A: Antibody testing is not designed to be a diagnostic test and has limited value in the management and treatment of an individual patient.

Q: How are these tests helpful?

A: These tests can play a valuable public health role in the surveillance of communities by the CDC to track where the virus has been and where it is headed next.

Q: If my COVID-19 antibody results are positive, does that mean I am protected?

A: The presence of antibodies does not guarantee that you are protected and can't catch COVID-19 again. Therefore, it's important to continue following guidelines for social distancing and handwashing.

Q: My antibody test was positive. Does this mean I can safely care for my elderly parents since I've already been infected?

A: Unfortunately, the presence of antibodies does not mean you can't transmit the virus to others. Even with antibodies, it is still unknown whether you can catch the virus again. It is also common for people who do not have any symptoms to spread the virus to others.

Q: Is it possible for antibody testing to give me peace of mind?

A: It is unlikely the test results will give you peace of mind because there are so many variables. For example, the test cannot tell you if you are immune/are protected from the virus. It also provides varying levels of accuracy and could display a false positive or false negative result—even in the tests that have received FDA authorization.

Q: Can I go to LabCorp or Quest and request the test?

A: No. The decision to be tested for antibodies should be made in partnership with your doctor who will need to provide a written order. He/she can also fully review the limitations of testing and help determine any benefit.

Q: How is CareFirst covering antibody testing?

A: Effective April 11, 2020 through the end of the national health emergency, CareFirst is covering the full cost of in-network deductibles, copays and coinsurance for FDA-authorized and medically necessary antibody testing when ordered by a doctor, nurse practitioner or other authorized provider. For testing performed out of network, CareFirst or the plan sponsor will pay 100% up to charge.