Types of COVID-19 tests

COVID-19 tests are available that can test for <u>current infection</u> or <u>past infection</u>.

A <u>**viral test**</u> tells you if you have an infection now. There are two types of viral tests: nucleic acid amplification tests (NAATs) and antigen tests. Viral tests are available at all <u>State-run test sites</u> and some primary care offices, pharmacies, and respiratory clinics.

An <u>**antibody test**</u> (also known as a serology test) might tell you if you had an infection in the past. Antibody tests should not be used to diagnose a current infection. Antibody tests are available at some primary care offices, pharmacies, and respiratory clinics.

Two kinds of viral tests are available at State-run sites.

1. **The polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test** is a type of NAAT, and it looks for pieces of the COVID-19 virus' genes. It is sent to a lab for processing and results are usually ready in 1-2 days. The PCR test is the preferred test for diagnosing COVID-19 in asymptomatic and symptomatic patients.

2. **Rapid antigen tests** detect the virus' proteins instead of its genes. This type of test can be analyzed where the sample is collected. <u>Rapid antigen tests</u> work best in symptomatic patients and within a few days since symptoms started. Symptomatic patients who get a negative result on a rapid antigen test will also have a PCR test that is sent to the lab to confirm the result of the rapid antigen test.

Two types of swabs are commonly used for COVID-19 testing.

All State-run test sites use the anterior nares swab, which is put a ½ inch into the nostril. The swabber will turn the swab inside the nostril for 10 to 15 seconds. The same swab may be used in both nostrils.

Some respiratory clinics and primary care offices offer nasopharyngeal swabs to patients who ask for it. A **nasopharyngeal swab** is used to touch the nasopharynx, which is the upper part of the throat behind the nose. The swab is put into the nostril until it touches the top of the throat that is behind the nose (about 2 inches).

To learn more about COVID-19 testing options in Rhode Island, visit <u>covid.ri.gov/testing</u>.

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