Antibody Testing for COVID-19

What is COVID-19 antibody testing?

When you recover from an infection like COVID-19, your immune system makes antibodies to recognize and fight the same infection in the future. These antibodies remain in your blood. You can have a blood test to determine if your body has built up antibodies against that infection. If your infection is active, your blood may not contain enough antibodies yet to be detected. Antibodies usually form 1 to 3 weeks after an infection starts. Antibody tests should NOT be used to diagnose an active infection.

What test should I get if I have COVID-19 symptoms?

If you have symptoms of COVID-19, you need a COVID-19 test, NOT a COVID-19 antibody test. Contact your healthcare provider for additional information if you have symptoms of COVID-19. Follow COVID-19 prevention guidelines.

Do antibody tests safely measure my body's level of protection from COVID-19?

Currently, there is a lack of evidence to support using antibody testing to know if a person is 100% protected from a COVID-19 infection. The test may help determine how many people had COVID-19 infections. It may also aid in research to make a vaccine. At this time, Duke Health does not recommend that individuals be tested for COVID-19 antibodies.

What do my antibody test results mean?

- A positive antibody test means that you have antibodies in your blood to COVID-19 or to a similar infection like the "common cold."

- You may test positive because you had a COVID-19 infection without symptoms or without feeling badly. This is called an asymptomatic infection.

- It is possible to test positive for antibodies even if you never had the infection. This is called a false-positive.

- If you test positive for antibodies, it is unclear if the antibodies will protect you from a future COVID-19 infection. In other words, you may not have COVID-19 immunity.

- It is possible to have a COVID-19 infection but to test negative for antibodies. This is called a false-negative. False-negatives may occur if you had a mild infection, and your body did not build a big immune response or if you got the test too early to have built antibodies.

- If you test negative for COVID-19 antibodies, you may still get sick or you may have recently been exposed to the virus. It takes 1 to 3 weeks for antibodies to show up in your blood. You could still spread the virus.

- The rates of false-positives and false-negatives for antibody tests are unknown.

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### If I have a positive antibody test, do I still need to wear a mask?

Regardless of test results, everyone must wear a facemask to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 infection.

Is Duke planning to offer an antibody test? If so, when?

Yes, Duke is planning to offer an antibody test. At this time, the laboratory is working on the test to make sure it is accurate and determining how its use will benefit the care of our patients.

Are antibody tests helpful in determining the re-opening of the health system, the university, the city, or the state?

Duke Health continues to work hard with infectious diseases and infection prevention experts to prepare for re-opening the health system safely for our patients, visitors, and team members. At this time, antibody tests are not a guide for the safe reopening of the health system, university, city, or state. We continue to follow these measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19:
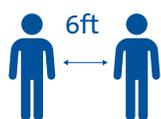
Social distancing measures

Universal masking

Increased hand hygiene

Cough and respiratory etiquette

Avoiding going out into public or around others when ill

Increased cleaning of high-touch surfaces

For more information, please visit the Centers for Disease Control at CDC.gov or the World Health Organization at WHO.int

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