Home COVID-19 testing information

When should I use a home (OTC) test and when should I get a lab-based PCR test?

If you begin to experience a fever, cough, sore throat, headache, runny nose or congestion, it’s important to get tested right away. An at-home OTC test is a good first option in this situation, and if the result is positive, it likely means you have Covid-19. When you have symptoms and an OTC test is positive, there isn’t a need to confirm the result with a lab-based test. However, if the at-home test is negative, it doesn’t necessarily mean you’re in the clear. If your symptoms persist or get worse, it’s a good idea to take another at-home test after a day or two. If the repeat at-home test is also negative, you should strongly consider getting a lab-based PCR test.

Using an OTC test before gathering indoors with others can help you know if you are likely to spread the virus that causes COVID-19. This is especially important before gathering with unvaccinated children or adults, older individuals, those who are immunocompromised, or individuals at risk of severe disease.

Testing a few days after you have been exposed or potentially exposed to an individual with COVID-19 is also recommended. Again, if you have reason to believe you may be infected but tested negative with an OTC test you should follow up with a lab-based PCR test.

My test was positive, what should I do now?

- Report your positive result at rapidtestmv.org. The website also provides current isolation and quarantine guidance.

- If you are at risk for severe disease from COVID-19 infection, or if you have severe symptoms, you should contact your healthcare provider immediately to talk about any treatments you may need.

- You will need to stay home and isolate yourself from others for at least 5 days and mask around others for an additional 5 days. If you reported your test to rapidtestmv.org a contact tracer will reach out and provide isolation guidance.

- Tell your close contacts that they may have been exposed. You can begin spreading COVID-19 starting 2 days before you have any symptoms or test positive. By telling your close contacts they may have been exposed, you are helping to protect everyone.

My test was negative, what does that mean?

- A negative test result means the virus that causes COVID-19 was not detected.

- **It is possible for a test to give a negative result in some people who have COVID-19.** OTC tests may show a negative result during the first days of infection as the viral load may not yet be high enough to detect.

- If you test negative but have symptoms of COVID-19, especially if you know you were exposed to someone else with COVID-19, you should isolate yourself from others and retest in a day or two. You may also consider getting a PCR test at the hospital by calling (508) 684-4500.