



COVID-19 Testing Frequently Asked Questions Current as of August 24, 2020

Send questions to the Health Subcommittee via hotline@cityofportsmouth.com

These FAQs were created to help you decide what type of test is best for you and where to get the test performed.

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The Citizen Response Task Force was created by the Portsmouth NH City Council in June 2020, "to help the City quickly and safely respond to the Governor's guidelines for reopening, in Portsmouth."

What is the difference between a "COVID-19 virus test" and a "COVID-19 antibody test"?

- The virus test tells you if you are currently infected with COVID-19.
- The antibody test tells you if you have had the infection in the past and currently have antibodies that may protect you from re-infection. It can take 1–3 weeks after infection for your body to make antibodies. Having antibodies to the virus that causes COVID-19 might provide protection from getting infected with the virus again. If it does, we do not know how much protection the antibodies might provide or how long this protection might last.

What are the types of virus tests?

- "Rapid" tests: This test provides results at the testing site, usually within an hour. This test is checking to see if viral antigen (a piece of the virus's outer coat or surface) is present on the nose or throat specimen. A positive test result from this test is highly accurate. But a negative test result is less accurate, which means this test might miss an infection that the molecular test identifies. So, if you have symptoms but your results from this test are negative, you should talk to your doctor about further testing.
- Molecular tests: Also called the RT-PCR test or LAMP test, this test is highly accurate but might take up to a week to obtain the test result. This test checks for the presence of virus's genetic material (RNA). Samples may be taken from the nose, throat or saliva.

How is the virus test sample obtained?

- Samples, also called specimens, can be obtained from the upper sinuses or nasal cavity ("deep nasopharyngeal"), back of the throat ("oropharyngeal"), saliva or sputum ("mucus" or "phlegm").
- Healthcare providers have concluded that a sample from the upper sinuses or nasal cavity (nasopharyngeal) provides the best specimen for COVID-19 testing and is less likely to return a false result. This procedure may be uncomfortable but is very quick. Below is an image of a health care worker getting a deep nasal cavity swab.
- While throat swab testing is more comfortable than the nasal test, it may result in a false negative finding: even though the test is negative you do have COVID-19. If you have any COVID-19 symptoms and you receive negative test results, you need further testing. Below is an image of how a throat swab is collected.
- Saliva tests are a new COVID-19 PCR molecular test option, but not yet available in Portsmouth. These tests require you to spit into a sterile container which is sent for testing. The newest saliva test, SalivaDirect, has a high level of accuracy, but can still produce false-negative results. If you have COVID-19 symptoms and you receive negative results, you need further testing.

Should I get a COVID-19 test?

- If you have any COVID-19 symptoms, believe you may have been exposed, are at “high risk,” or want the reassurance of a test result, you should contact your healthcare provider and ask to be tested. Or you can call or go online, without a doctor’s order, to schedule a test at any of the local testing centers (see below). You can also order a home test, follow the collection directions, and send the sample back for testing results.

COVID-19 symptoms include:

- o fever over 100.4F with or without chills
- o cough, shortness of breath or difficulty with breathing
- o sore throat
- o congestion with or without a runny nose
- o nausea/vomiting/diarrhea
- o fatigue or a sense of low energy
- o muscle and body aches
- o headaches
- o recent loss of sense of smell or taste

The following are considered “high risk” conditions:

- o those over the age of 60 years
- o anyone with chronic kidney disease
- o COPD
- o type 2 diabetes
- o high blood pressure (hypertension)
- o asthma or any lung disease
- o sickle cell disease
- o neurologic (brain/spinal cord) conditions
- o immune deficiency for any reason (organ transplant, cancer, immune disease)

Where can I go in Portsmouth to get a test?

All testing sites require preregistration or an appointment made by phone or online as listed below. All of these testing locations offer Molecular (PCR) testing.

- Rite Aid Pharmacy (free testing)

Schedule an appointment online: <https://www.riteaid.com/pharmacy/services/COVID-19-testing>

This site uses the drug store’s drive-thru window where you receive instructions from the pharmacist on taking your own sample from your nose using a swab. Test results take 2-7 days and you will receive a phone call if your test is positive.

- Convenient MD

Call: (833) 263-0131

Online: <https://convenientmd.com/virtual-visit/>

When you arrive for your appointment, a medical aide will take either a nasal swab or a throat swab. Test results take 3-7 days and you will receive a phone call if your test is positive for the virus.

- Clear Choice MD

Call: (603) 667-9705

Online: <https://ccmdcenters.com/virtual-visits>

When you arrive for your appointment, a medical aide will take a nasal swab. This site also offers antibody testing.

- Portsmouth Regional Hospital Appledore Medical Group

Call: (603) 294-1231

Online: <https://appledoremedicalgroup.com/covid-19/latest-updates/COVID-19-testing.dot>

When you arrive for your appointment, a medical aide will take a deep nasal swab

Note: Portsmouth Regional Hospital providing tests for hospital patients and staff only. No public testing offered.

How much does the test cost and will my insurance cover the cost?

- The Families First Coronavirus Response Act ensures that COVID-19 testing is free to anyone in the U.S., including the uninsured.
- Most health insurance plans cover testing for COVID-19 without a copay, coinsurance, or deductible.
- If you do not have insurance or have a health insurance plan that does not fully cover the cost of testing you may be eligible for the New Hampshire Medicaid Limited COVID-19 Testing Benefit and can apply for that coverage online through NH EASY at <https://nheasy.nh.gov> and click on “COVID-19 Testing.”

What about the in-home test kits?

- In-home test kits can be purchased or ordered online by searching for COVID-19 home tests. Some of the labs require pre-payment while other test centers will bill your insurance company. The accuracy of this test depends on how well you follow the instructions for sample collection and returning the sample as directed. Results are generally available 3 days after the lab receives the sample in the mail (not after it's mailed).
- If your in-home test result is positive, it is important to limit your exposure to other people and continue to monitor your symptoms. If your results are negative, the virus was not present in the sample you provided. However, it is important to note that the virus may not be detected by the test in early stages of infection or if the sample is not collected as directed.
- If you have reason to believe you have been exposed, it is important to follow up with a healthcare provider for further evaluation or to get re-tested.

What about the antibody test?

- The antibody test is a blood test to check for the presence of COVID-19 virus antibodies in your blood.
- This test is ordered by your healthcare provider who will explain the results to you once the test is completed.
- This test may or may not be covered by your insurance. If you are not sure you should contact your health insurance company and ask if the COVID-19 antibody test, including the blood collection, is covered by your policy.

Additional Resources

For virus testing locations in New Hampshire: The New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services provides this list as a service to the community. The Department does not endorse any particular entity for COVID-19 testing services. <https://www.dhhs.nh.gov/dphs/cdcs/covid19/documents/covid-testing-options.pdf>

For detailed state dashboards visit:

Johns Hopkins COVID Tracker: <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/region/us/new-hampshire>

NH (interactive map, by town): <https://www.nh.gov/covid19/dashboard/summary.htm>

MA: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/covid-19-response-reporting>

ME: <https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/infectious-disease/epi/airborne/coronavirus/data.shtml>

US MAP of COVID-19 cases source: <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/us/coronavirus-us-cases.html#map>