



COVID-19 Testing Frequently Asked Questions Current as of December 11, 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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James Petersen, Petersen Engineering,
Co-Chair
Mark Stebbins, ProCon Construction,
Co-Chair
Karen Conard, City Manager
Kim I. McNamara, City Health Officer

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City Health Officer
James Petersen, P.E., Petersen
Engineering

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" (antigen) test: 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.
- 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.
- 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 or are at “high risk,” 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)

As of December 2020 the recommendations for testing have been revised in response to increased testing demand and limited testing capacity. If you have been exposed to a person with Covid-19 it is recommended that you schedule a PCR test on/about the 5th day after exposure if you are not experiencing symptoms. This is the timeframe when it is most likely the test will confirm whether or not you are infected. If you develop symptoms you can either schedule a PCR test or an antigen test [provided you’ve had symptoms for no more than 5 days]. Scroll down below for more information on testing location.

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. ConvenientMD also offers the Antigen Test.

- 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/>

Pre-registration is not required at this time for any COVID-19 test at Convenient MD, including the Antigen test. You can reserve an appointment time online or call the number below, but anyone can go directly to ConvenientMD without an appointment. You will be greeted at the entrance by a ConvenientMD staff member, who will instruct you to go to your car and wait for a ConvenientMD provider for an evaluation and the test.

PCR test: Either a nasal swab or throat swab are collected by a medical person once you arrive at Convenient MD. The swab is then sent to the lab and results come back in 3-7 days. You will receive a phone call if your test is positive for the virus. **Antigen test:** Also known as a rapid test, you will need a referral from your health care provider to get the antigen

test. This test is only available to those that have been experiencing symptoms for 5 days or less. Results are given in person; the wait time is 15 minutes.

- Clear Choice MD

Online: <https://ccmdcenters.com/coronavirus2019>

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).
- As of December 2020, over-the-counter home diagnostic tests were approved for home testing. The kits should be available for purchase in January 2021. FDA review of these home tests has found them to be reliable, and they do not require a prescription. Home diagnostic tests allow you to collect the specimen and test at home for the presence of the virus – in essence becoming an all-in-one immediate test. At-home instructions explain how to collect a nasal swab and then use the supplied test strip and solution to check for the presence of the viral antigen. The tests are recommended for use on persons aged 2 years or older whether or not the person is showing any signs of COVID-19 infection. They require access to a smart phone to send and receive the test results (estimated to be available in about 20 minutes. The tests are expected to be sold at local drug stores when available.
- 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/tested as directed. If you test negative and experience Covid-19 like symptoms you should follow up with your health care provider as there is a small chance of a false negative test [meaning you have Covid-19 but the test came back negative].
- 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>