Antibody Testing – Frequently asked questions

What are antibodies?

When we get infections, our bodies create proteins to fight infections. These are called antibodies.

What's the difference between an antibody test and a test for COVID-19?

A test for COVID-19 detects the presence of the virus itself whereas an antibody test detects antibodies to the virus. Antibody tests can show that a person had an infection in the past. But, it's possible for people who still test positive to COVID-19 through a viral test to also test positive for antibodies. Medical providers should not use antibody tests to determine if a person has COVID-19. And, some commercial antibody tests have been inaccurate.

How long does it take for a person to create antibodies?

It can take days or weeks for a person to develop antibodies.

Do antibody tests for COVID-19 work?

Many commercial antibody tests do not work well, and therefore can be concerning. That's because people could assume that positive antibody test results mean they are immune to COVID-19.

Medical experts don't know yet if antibodies to COVID-19 will protect people from future infections. Researchers are working to learn if antibodies will be protective, and if they are, how long they would last or how many antibodies would be necessary to fight COVID-19. In addition, the virus can change or mutate as it travels from person to person and country to country. That's what happens with the flu virus. And that's why we need a new flu vaccine every fall. The virus has changed, and therefore, the flu vaccine must change as well.

Why is it so hard to create an accurate, high-quality antibody test?

COVID-19 is an infection that stems from a type of virus called a coronavirus. Coronaviruses are very common. Some of them cause common illnesses like the common cold. But, the specific coronavirus that causes COVID-19, SARS-CoV-2, is highly infectious and can be dangerous or deadly. Some inaccurate antibody tests are resulting in what are known as "false positives."

These tests may be detecting other coronaviruses, but not SARS-CoV-2. Be very cautious about results from an antibody test.

Does a positive result from an antibody test mean a person is immune to COVID-19?

Even if a test is accurate, medical experts don't know yet if antibodies for COVID-19 will prevent future infections. More research is needed into the virus that causes COVID-19, antibodies, and possible immunity.

Should I buy an antibody test at a pharmacy and count on its results?

No. You should be very cautious about antibody testing. Work with your doctor if you think you need antibody testing.

If I have a positive result from an antibody test, am I immune? Will I be protected from getting COVID-19 in the future?

Until antibody testing and immunities related to COVID-19 are much better understood, you should continue to follow all recommended precautions to avoid catching or spreading COVID-19, even if you think you have had COVID-19 in the past or even if you've gotten a positive result to an antibody test.

Wash your hands regularly. Keep at least 6 feet away from people in public. And, if you are sick, stay home. If you need medical advice, please consult with your provider. If you are concerned about going out for a doctor's visit, you can easily do a <u>Virtual Visit</u>.