



National Indian Health Board

NATIONAL TRIBAL COVID-19 RESPONSE

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Image Source: CDC.gov

COVID-19 Testing in Indian Country



COVID-19 is a new disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. Procedures to test for the presence of the virus and diagnosis of the disease are evolving quickly. This document seeks to provide some general information, but NIHB suggests visiting the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website for the most up to date information on testing eligibility and procedures at www.CDC.gov/coronavirus.

There are currently two types of tests:

- **Viral Tests:** This test shows if you have COVID-19 right now- not if you have had it in the past.
 - This is the most common test for SARS-CoV-2. This is the test is used to diagnose COVID-19.
- **Antibody Tests** (also called serological or serology tests): This tests seeks to find if you have antibodies in your blood that have been produced by your body in response to the presence of SARS-CoV-2.
 - This test may show if you have had been infected with SARS-CoV-2 in the past.
 - This test cannot show that you currently infected with SARS-CoV-2 right now, or be used to diagnose COVID-19.
 - There is not enough information to know if a positive tests means that your body has developed a natural level of protection from future SARS-CoV-2 infections.
 - As the testing methodologies for SARS-CoV-2 evolve, some existing tests have been found to be less effective and therefore less trustworthy. Some antibody tests may produce a false positive or negative result. Talk to your healthcare provider about the different testing options available.

Who Should be Tested?

If you have symptoms of COVID-19, it is up to you, your healthcare provider and/or Tribal health department to decide if you should be tested. Most people with COVID-19 will get better on their own with no medical intervention, and there is no medicine that currently cures COVID-19. However, testing can be helpful in tracking the virus and preventing further spread.

CDC recommends testing using the **Viral Test** in these circumstances:

- You have symptoms of COVID-19 infection including: fever, cough, shortness of breath, chills, muscle pain, loss of taste or smell, vomiting, diarrhea, and/or sore throat.
 - The highest priority tests should be given to hospitalized patients, healthcare workers, first responders, and people living in ‘congregate living facilities’ (long-term care, prisons, and shelters) with symptoms.

CDC does not have specific guidance for **Antibody Testing**. The primary purpose of this test is to understand how COVID-19 has spread throughout the US population at this time.

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Your Tribal health department and/or healthcare provider may choose to test you even if you are not exhibiting symptoms based on local guidance and test availability. If you have symptoms, and are seeking medical care or testing, please contact the clinic or testing site beforehand and tell them you think you have COVID-19. This will allow them to protect themselves and other patients from getting sick.

Where Can I Get Tested?

Call your Indian Health Service (IHS), Tribal, or urban Indian health facility or Tribal health department to find out where testing is happening in your community. In some communities, separate testing sites have been set up, while in others, the local clinic or health department may offer the test. Some pharmacies may also offer self-testing, although these may be less likely to be accurate.

What Should I Expect During Testing?

During **Viral Testing**, your healthcare provider will swab up your nose, and could also swab your throat. If you have a cough, they may also ask you to cough into a cup to collect a sample. Your provider may also choose to test you for other illnesses such as the flu or strep throat. If you use a self-test, you will be asked to swab your own nose.

During **Antibody Testing**, your provider will collect a blood sample, most likely from a finger prick.

Testing time varies by location, but tests may take as little as one day, or as long as one week. Some Tribes may also offer rapid viral testing on site, which provides results in minutes. Ask your provider when you should expect the results and how they will be communicated to you.



What Should I do if the Test is Positive?

Your healthcare provider is the best source of information. Keep them updated on your symptoms, and call them with any questions. Visit www.CDC.gov/coronavirus for full guidance on what to do if you are sick.

Positive Viral Test

This means you currently have COVID-19.

Keep others from getting sick:

Most people with COVID-19 will not exhibit any outward symptoms, and most people with COVID-19 will get better at home on their own. However, after receiving a positive viral test, it is important you keep others from getting sick.

- Stay at home except to get medical care. Tell your providers you have COVID-19 before any appointments.
- Avoid being around other people in public or in your home.
- Wear a facemask if you will be around other people, including during medical appointments.
- Try to stay away from people within your home. If you can, stay in a separate room and use a separate bathroom. In particular, avoid contact with elders or people at increased vulnerability (i.e., people who are overweight, those with chronic diseases, those with compromised immune systems).
- Cover your nose and mouth when you cough or sneeze.
- Wash your hands frequently with warm water and soap. If not available, use alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Clean surfaces in your home frequently- at least once per day.

Seek medical help immediately if you have:

- Difficulty breathing
- Pain or pressure in your chest
- Confusion or trouble staying awake
- Bluish lips or face

Tell your healthcare provider or the 911 operator that you have COVID-19 before help arrives or before you arrive at a clinic or hospital.

Being isolated with COVID-19 can be difficult for many people, and it is normal to feel worried, sad, lonely, or confused. It is important to stay in contact with your loved ones through phone or email, and to do activities you enjoy or find relaxing. If you are struggling with managing your feelings, talk to your healthcare provider to get support from a professional. You can also call the *Disaster Distress Helpline* for support at 1-800-985-5990.

When can I stop self-isolation?

Once you feel better, you may want to stop isolating. The decision to stop should be made in partnership with your healthcare provider or Tribal health department.

In general, you can stop isolating when:

- You have no fever for at least 72 hours (3 days) without using medicine AND you have no other symptoms AND it has been at least 7 full days since you first got sick.
OR
- You have no fever without using medicine AND you have no other symptoms AND you have two negative COVID-19 viral tests, 24 hours apart.

Positive (Reactive) Antibody Test:

This means you had COVID-19 infection in the past.

If you have symptoms, follow up with your healthcare provider and/or Tribal health department for guidance- you may need to receive a Viral Test. If you do not have symptoms, you do not need to follow up. Because it is unclear if a positive test provides protection against future infections, and because false positive tests are possible, continue to practice social distancing and other preventative guidelines your Tribe or community has put in place.

What Should I do if the Test is Negative?

Negative Viral Test:

You probably do not have COVID-19 right now. A negative test results does not rule out that you may get sick at a later time. Monitor your symptoms, and talk to your healthcare provider about next steps. Follow your Tribe's guidance about social distancing and prevention strategies. Continue to wash your hands frequently, avoid contact with others if COVID-19 is spreading in your community, and stay home if you feel sick.

Negative (Non-reactive) Antibody Test:

You probably did not have COVID-19 previously. However, this does not rule out a current COVID-19 infection- antibodies usually don't show up until 1-3 weeks or more after infection. If you have symptoms, follow up with your healthcare provider and/or Tribal Health Department for guidance- you may need to receive a Viral Test. Follow your Tribe's guidance about social distancing. Continue to wash your hands frequently, avoid contact with others if COVID-19 is spreading in your community, and stay home if you feel sick.