

Should Your Child Be Tested for COVID-19?

Many families are asking whether their children should be tested for COVID-19 (</English/health-issues/conditions/chest-lungs/Pages/2019-Novel-Coronavirus.aspx>). The American Academy of Pediatrics encourages parents to talk to their child's doctor about testing. Your pediatrician can help determine when testing may be a good idea based on infection rates and availability of tests in your area. They can also help you follow up on test results.



Types of COVID-19 tests

There are two types of COVID-19 tests: diagnostic tests and antibody tests. Your pediatrician can talk with you about what each test can and cannot do, and when tests can be most useful.

Diagnostic testing: Does your child have COVID-19 now?

A diagnostic or viral test can show if your child currently has a COVID-19 infection (</English/tips-tools/symptom-checker/Pages/symptomviewer.aspx?symptom=Coronavirus%20%28COVID-19%29%20Diagnosed%20or%20Suspected>). This type of testing may be used if you know your child was exposed to COVID-19, for example, or if someone in your household is showing symptoms.

- **Molecular test.** One kind of diagnostic test is a molecular test. It uses a nasal or throat swab or sometimes saliva. You might get results the same day or up to a week later. The molecular test is very accurate and tells you if your child has COVID-19. It will not tell if your child had COVID-19 in the past.
- **Antigen test.** Another kind of diagnostic test is an antigen test. It uses a nasal or throat swab. Results take an hour or less. Positive test results are very accurate. But if the test result is negative, a molecular test might be needed so you know for sure that your child does not have COVID-19.



Source: U.S. Food and Drug Administration

Antibody testing: Has your child had COVID-19 at some point?

An **antibody test** checks a sample of your child's blood for special proteins called antibodies. The body makes these to fight off viruses like SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. Antibody tests help show whether someone's immune system has been infected by COVID-19 in the past, even if there were no symptoms.

Antibody tests cannot detect a current COVID-19 infection. This is because it may take up to three weeks after your child first shows symptoms of being sick before the test can find antibodies in the blood sample. Many test locations can give you results the same day or within one to three days. Sometimes, a second antibody test is needed.

Scientists don't know yet if people who had COVID-19 can catch it again. Based on what we know today, though, it is not recommended that antibody testing be used to make decisions about safe entering or returning to group settings like schools (</English/health-issues/conditions/chest-lungs/Pages/Return-to-School-During-COVID-19.aspx>), child care (</English/tips-tools/ask-the-pediatrician/Pages/Is-it-safe-to-send-my-child-to-child-care-during-COVID-19.aspx>), summer camps or dorms. Keep in mind that these recommendations are subject to change as more information becomes available.

Remember

After your child has a diagnostic or antibody test, it is important to talk with your pediatrician about positive or negative test results. If you have any concerns about your child's health, call your pediatrician.

More Information

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- [Is it OK to see my pediatrician during COVID-19? \(/English/tips-tools/ask-the-pediatrician/Pages/Is-it-OK-to-call-the-pediatrician-during-COVID-19-even-if-Im-not-sure-my-child-is-sick.aspx\)](#)
- [Is it safe to send my child to child care during COVID-19? \(/English/tips-tools/ask-the-pediatrician/Pages/Is-it-safe-to-send-my-child-to-child-care-during-COVID-19.aspx\)](#)
- [2019 Novel Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) \(/English/health-issues/conditions/chest-lungs/Pages/2019-Novel-Coronavirus.aspx\)](#)
- [Interim Guidelines for COVID-19 Antibody Testing \(https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/lab/resources/antibody-tests-guidelines.html\)](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/lab/resources/antibody-tests-guidelines.html)(Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

Note: Adapted from "What type of coronavirus test should my child get?" by Trisha Koriath, AAP News, June 2020.

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