

COVID-19 Self-Testing Guidance

Summary of February 8, 2023 Changes

- Updated guidance about use of repeat testing if your test is negative

Introduction

Testing is critically important to help reduce the spread of COVID-19. Testing is useful in multiple situations:

- If you have symptoms of COVID-19, you should get tested as soon as possible and follow the steps in [COVID-19 Symptom Decision Trees](#).
- If you are exposed to someone who has COVID-19, you should follow the guidance in [What to do if you were potentially exposed to someone with COVID-19](#), including testing.
- You may sometimes test in advance of an upcoming activity, such as travel, even if you do not have symptoms and are not aware of being exposed to someone with COVID-19.

You can be tested by a healthcare provider, a public health testing site, or can use either a **self-collection kit** or a **self-test** that can be performed at home or anywhere else. Sometimes a self-test is also called a “home test,” “at-home test,” or an “over-the-counter test.” Currently available self-collection kits and self-tests are used to check for current infection, meaning whether or not you likely have COVID-19 right now. They do not give information on whether you had COVID-19 in the past.

Self-collection kits and self-tests are available either by prescription or over-the-counter (without a prescription) in a pharmacy or retail store. Most private insurance is [required](#) to cover 8 self-tests per covered person per month. Households across the state are also eligible to receive free COVID-19 tests from the Department of Health (DOH) through its Say Yes! COVID Test initiative. This is in addition to any federal initiative. Households can currently place two orders each month, which includes up to 10 free tests per month. Orders can be submitted online via [Home - Say Yes! To Covid Test \(sayyescovidhometest.org\)](#) or via the DOH COVID-19 Hotline 1-800-525-0127. It is important to be prepared and have tests available on hand to test when needed. Tests generally can be expected to arrive in 2-4 days from receipt of order, though this may vary in different parts of the state.

At this time, the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has not approved or authorized any at-home COVID-19 rapid antigen test for use in children under 2 years of age. However, at-home rapid antigen tests may be safely used in children under 2 years of age for purposes of post-exposure, isolation, and symptomatic testing. It is recommended that parents or guardians deciding to test children under 2 years of age administer the at-home rapid antigen test themselves.

Because the FDA has not approved or authorized at-home COVID-19 rapid antigen test for use in children under 2 years of age, K-12 schools and child cares with a waived medical test site (MTS) license are not permitted to perform at-home rapid antigen tests on children under 2 years of age. K-

12 schools and child cares may provide at-home rapid antigen tests to parents or caregivers for their use.

This document provides guidance on what to do after a self-test. This means a test that you do yourself, which is not prescribed or administered by a healthcare provider or sent to a laboratory.

If you are using a self-test, make sure to read the complete manufacturer's instructions before using the test. Talk to a healthcare provider if you have questions about your results. Some schools and workplaces may accept self-tests for return to work or school. You should discuss your results with your employer, school, etc. to determine if you are ready to return.

Report your self-test results (both negative and positive) online using the [Say Yes! COVID Test Digital Assistant](#). You can use this tool to report any self-test, even if you did not order your test from the Say Yes! COVID Test program. Reporting self-tests helps us better understand the spread of COVID-19 in Washington.

If Your Test Is Positive

If you test positive with a self-test, refer to the Washington State DOH [What to do if you test positive for COVID-19](#) guidance for detailed information on how to protect yourself and others, including information on isolation and how to access treatment if you are at increased risk for severe disease. Repeat testing is not recommended with a positive test result. Tell your healthcare provider about your positive test result and keep in touch with them during your illness. If you have questions and cannot access a healthcare provider, call the WA DOH Hotline at 1-800-525-0127.

Early intervention with COVID-19 therapeutics (treatments and medications) can reduce the risk of severe illness and hospitalization for people with COVID-19 who are at high risk of developing more serious illness. People who are more likely to get very sick include older adults (ages 50 years or more, with risk increasing with older age), people who are unvaccinated or not up to date, and children and adults with certain medical conditions, such as a weakened immune system. If you think you may qualify, please speak to your health care provider to determine your eligibility for COVID-19 therapeutics (PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis), monoclonal antibodies or oral antivirals). **Don't delay: Treatment must be started within days after you first develop symptoms to be effective.**

If you are interested in accessing free telehealth resources, please visit [Free Telehealth for COVID-19 Treatment](#) and follow the instructions to set up an appointment. Visit the [DOH webpage](#) for more information for you and your health care provider on specific COVID-19 therapeutics.

If you need assistance with isolation, such as with food, personal care kits, or other needs, you can call the WA DOH Hotline at 1-800-525-0127 to report your positive test result and ask to speak with Care Connect, or reach out to your [Care Connect](#) hub. If you need assistance with isolation, please report your test result through the hotline to prevent delays in accessing assistance.

Tell your close contacts they may have been exposed to COVID-19 and send them [What to do if you were potentially exposed to someone with COVID-19](#). Being a close contact generally means a person has been within 6 feet of someone with COVID-19 for at least 15 cumulative minutes or more over a 24-hour period of time. If, however, you have been in situations that increase the risk of potential exposure, such as confined spaces, poor ventilation or performing activities such as shouting or singing, there is still a risk for infecting others even if they are more than 6 feet away from you. You can spread

COVID-19 starting 48 hours (or 2 days) before you have any symptoms and for at least 10 days after you develop symptoms. If you do not develop symptoms but test positive for COVID-19, you could have spread COVID-19 starting 48 hours (or 2 days) before you test positive and for at least 10 days after your positive test. If your isolation period is longer than 10 days, such as because you are still experiencing symptoms or are severely ill or immunocompromised, you are considered contagious through the end of your isolation period. By letting your close contacts know they may have been exposed to COVID-19, you are helping to protect everyone.

If you use [WA Notify](#) and test positive for COVID-19 with a self-test, you can use WA Notify to anonymously alert other users you may have exposed by requesting a verification code and confirming your result in the app. This will notify people using the app who were potentially exposed so they may take precautions to protect themselves and the people around them. No personal or identifiable information is collected or shared when you use WA Notify. To request a verification code:

1. Using your mobile device (Android or iPhone), scan the QR code or [request a verification code](#):



2. Enter the phone number of your device that uses WA Notify and the date of your positive COVID-19 test.
3. Select “Continue.”

If you are unable to request a verification code in WA Notify, you should call the state COVID-19 hotline, 1-800-525-0127, then press #, and let the hotline staff know that you are a WA Notify user. The hotline staff can provide you with a verification link you can use to alert other WA Notify users that they may have been exposed.

Please visit the “[How to notify others if you test positive for COVID-19 with a self-test](#)” section on [WANotify.org](#) for more information. If you would like to learn more about WA Notify, including how to add it to your phone, visit [WANotify.org](#).

If Your Test Is Negative

A negative test result means that SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, was not detected by the test at that time.

Serial testing is when a person tests multiple times, such as every few days. By testing frequently, you may detect COVID-19 more quickly and reduce the spread of infection. The self-collection kits often come with a second test and are designed to be used in a series. If your first self-test is negative, you should follow the manufacturer’s instructions for serial testing. These commonly call for testing to be

performed at least twice over three days, with at least 24 hours and no more than 48 hours between tests. Contact a healthcare provider if you have any questions about your test results or serial testing.

A negative at-home COVID-19 antigen test can sometimes be a “false negative” result. This means the test did not detect the SARS-CoV-2 virus that was in your nasal swab sample. Consider repeat testing if you have symptoms of COVID-19 or a high likelihood of COVID-19 infection (such as being in an area where the COVID-19 [community level](#) is high or if you were exposed to someone with COVID-19):

- If you initially tested negative and have COVID-19 symptoms, consider retesting every 24-48 hours through at least five days after your symptoms started.
- If you do not have COVID-19 symptoms and may have been exposed to COVID-19, consider retesting with an antigen test 24-48 hours after the first negative test. If the second test is negative, but concerns exist for COVID-19, consider retesting 24-48 hours after the second negative test, for a total of at least 3 tests. If you do not have adequate resources to test 3 times with an antigen test, it is acceptable to test less in accordance with your resources and the level of risk to you and those around you.
- If your repeat testing results are negative but you remain concerned you could have COVID-19, you may choose to test again using an antigen test, consider getting a laboratory molecular-based test, or call your health care provider.

See the DOH [Symptom Decision Tree for Non-Health Care Settings and the Public](#) for more information.

If you were exposed to someone who has COVID-19 and you serially test negative, continue to follow the guidance in [What to do if you were potentially exposed to someone with COVID-19](#).

If Your Result Shows Invalid or Error

Sometimes the results are not clear or are inconclusive, and the test is unable to tell you if your results are positive or negative. Invalid results can occur for many reasons, such as your specimen may not have been collected correctly or the self-collection test kit may have malfunctioned. Invalid test results are rare but can occur.

If the display on the self-test shows an invalid result or a test error, the test did not work properly. If this happens, repeat the test with a new test kit once if another test is available. If the second result is still invalid, refer to the instructions and contact the manufacturer for assistance. You can also get testing from a healthcare provider or a [public health testing site](#).

More COVID-19 Information and Resources

Stay up-to-date on the [current COVID-19 situation in Washington](#), [symptoms](#), [how it spreads](#), [how and when people should get tested](#), and [where to find vaccines](#). See our [Frequently Asked Questions](#) for more information.

A person’s race/ethnicity or nationality does not, itself, put them at greater risk of COVID-19. However, data are revealing that communities of color are being disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. This is due to the effects of racism, and in particular, structural racism, that leaves some groups with fewer

opportunities to protect themselves and their communities. [Stigma will not help to fight the illness.](#)
Share only accurate information to keep rumors and misinformation from spreading.

- [WA State Department of Health COVID-19 Response](#)
- [Find Your Local Health Department or District](#)
- [CDC Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)

Have more questions? Call our COVID-19 Information hotline at **1-800-525-0127**. Hotline hours:

- Monday from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m.
- Tuesday through Sunday from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m.
- [observed state holidays](#) from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m.

For interpretative services, **press #** when they answer and **say your language**. For questions about your own health or testing results, please contact a health care provider.

To request this document in another format, call 1-800-525-0127. Deaf or hard of hearing customers, please call 711 ([Washington Relay](#)) or email civil.rights@doh.wa.gov.