

This guidance document is being reviewed for updates. The Washington State Department of Health has updated its guidance for what to do if you are sick with COVID-19 or were exposed to COVID-19. This document may have content that is inconsistent with the [new guidance](#).

# COVID-19 Self-Testing Guidance

## Summary of November 7, 2023 Changes

- Removed recommendation to report self-test results through [Say Yes! COVID Test](#) and [Make My Test Count](#)

## Introduction

**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.

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 the Washington State Department of Health (DOH) [COVID-19 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 or an indoor event or gathering, 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. This [fact sheet](#) provides information about insurance coverage for COVID-19 tests. Check with your insurance provider to verify coverage of costs associated with at-home test purchases.

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 after being exposed, if a child is experiencing symptoms, or to identify COVID-19 infection to begin isolation. 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 tests for use in children under 2 years of age, K-12 schools and child cares with a waived medical test site 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.

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, child cares, and workplaces may accept self-tests for return to work, school, or child care. You should discuss your results with your employer, school, etc. to determine if you or your child are ready to return.

## If Your Test Is Positive

If you test positive with a self-test, refer to the 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 DOH Hotline at 1-800-525-0127.

If you test positive and are more likely to get very sick from COVID-19 because of your age or chronic medication conditions, treatments are available that can reduce your chances of being hospitalized or dying from the disease. Medications to treat COVID-19 must be prescribed by a healthcare provider and started as soon as possible after diagnosis to be effective. Contact a healthcare provider right away to determine if you are eligible for treatment, even if your symptoms are mild right now. Visit the DOH webpage for more information for you and your health care provider on specific [COVID-19 therapeutics](#) and how to access treatment.

If you need support while you isolate, you can call the DOH Care Connect Hotline at 1-833-453-0336 to report your positive test result.

## 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.

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 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 [COVID-19 Decision Trees](#) for more information.

If you were exposed to someone who has COVID-19 and you repeatedly 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](#).

### Mental and Behavioral Health Resources

Please visit the DOH [Behavioral Health Resources and Recommendations](#) webpage.

### 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 DOH at **1-800-525-0127**.

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](mailto:civil.rights@doh.wa.gov).