

COVID Testing: Rapid vs. PCR

If you have COVID-19 symptoms or have had close contact with someone with a confirmed case of COVID-19, it's important to get tested to help prevent the spread of this virus in your community.

There are two types of tests used to determine if you have COVID-19: PCR tests and Rapid tests. A PCR test can detect genetic material from the virus that causes COVID-19. It is considered the most accurate test to show if you have an active infection.

This test is done by swabbing the nose or swabbing the mouth. Results are usually available in 2-3 days, but it can take up to a week or more depending on the demand for testing.

Now let's look at Rapid tests. A Rapid test detects proteins from the virus that causes COVID-19. This test is also done by swabbing the nose or swabbing the mouth. Results are quick, usually in 15-30 minutes.

You can also take an at home rapid test and get results within 15 minutes. Home rapid tests are available in pharmacies and online.

Results for a rapid test may be less reliable if you don't have any symptoms. For example, a false positive means that you get a positive result but you don't have COVID-19. While a false negative means that you get a negative result but you do have COVID-19. You may need to get a follow-up test to get the most accurate result.

Whether you get a negative or positive test result, it's important to do all you can to prevent the spread of COVID-19 by wearing a face mask, washing your hands often, and using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol when soap and water are not available and getting vaccinated and boosted, if eligible.

For more information on PCR and Rapid tests, visit [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov).