# Helpful guidelines if you test positive or negative for COVID-19 test

December 2 2022, by Joel Streed



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Have you recently taken a COVID-19 test? If you're waiting for your COVID-19 test results, Mayo Clinic COVID-19 diagnostic experts have some helpful guidelines to walk you through the process.

It all depends on the type of test and your results.

# Next steps after testing positive with polymerase chain reaction test

If you test positive for COVID-19 using a polymerase chain reaction, or PCR, test, follow these guidelines, based on Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines, to determine what you need to do:

- Isolate for at least five days. You can end isolation after five days if you are fever-free for 24 hours without using fever-reducing medication and your other [symptoms](#) have improved. Day zero is your first day of symptoms. NOTE: You also should check with your employer, school district or public health department for exact isolation guidelines for you and/or your family if you test positive for COVID-19, as those guidelines may differ.
- If you test positive for COVID-19 and never develop symptoms, commonly referred to as asymptomatic, isolate for at least five days and wear a mask around others at home. Day zero is the day the sample was collected for a positive test result.
- Contact your health care team to let them know you tested positive for COVID-19 so it can be documented in your health record.
- At the end of isolation, wear a properly fitted surgical/procedural mask in public settings.
- If you still have a fever, regardless of how many days you've been in isolation, stay home and monitor your symptoms until you no longer have a fever.
- You may need to have a negative COVID-19 test result, either a PCR or at-home antigen test, before you can return to work or school. Check with your employer, school district or public health department to determine if this is needed.

If you test negative for COVID-19 using a PCR test, you are likely not infected, provided you do not have any symptoms.

Symptoms may include fever, chills, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, headache, cough, and loss of smell and taste.

If you do not have symptoms of COVID-19 and do not have known exposure to a person infected with COVID-19, you do not need to quarantine.

## Next steps after testing positive with an at-home antigen test

If you take an at-home COVID-19 antigen test and your results indicate you are positive for COVID-19, Mayo Clinic answers some common questions to help determine your next steps:

## QUESTION: Can I trust the results of an at-home antigen test?

ANSWER: If you have symptoms of COVID-19, take an at-home antigen test and it is positive, you likely have COVID-19 and should isolate at home according to CDC guidelines.

Sometimes an at-home COVID-19 antigen test can have a false-negative result. A negative at-home test is not a free pass if the person taking the test has symptoms.

If you use an at-home test that comes back negative and have symptoms that persist or get worse, it's a good idea to get a lab-based PCR test for COVID-19 and influenza. You also should stay home and isolate until you get the PCR test results back. The antigen test may have missed an

early infection.

## QUESTION: How long do I need to stay in isolation if I test positive for COVID-19 using an at-home antigen test?

ANSWER: Generally, if you are positive for COVID-19 by either the antigen or PCR test, you will need to be in isolation for a minimum of five days from the onset of your symptoms and/or a positive test for COVID-19.

## QUESTION: Do I need to have another COVID-19 test before I return to work or regular activity following the five days of isolation?

ANSWER: You may need to have a negative COVID-19 test result, either by a PCR or at-home antigen test, before you can return to work or school, depending on specific requirements for the organization and where you live.

## QUESTION: Should I let my local health care team know I tested positive for COVID-19?

ANSWER: Yes. You should let your local care team know you tested positive for COVID-19 using an at-home antigen test. This will ensure your care team can help you with any COVID-19-related care needs if you continue to have prolonged symptoms of COVID-19 or need to seek additional care related to COVID-19.

## QUESTION: Do I need to take another COVID-19

**antigen test to make sure I'm negative after a certain amount of time?**

ANSWER: No. If you no longer have symptoms after five days or are fever-free for at least 24 hours without using a fever-reducing medication, you do not need to take another COVID-19 test to confirm you are no longer positive, unless you have been directed to by your workplace or school. However, if your symptoms persist longer than five days, you should remain isolated until you no longer have symptoms for at least 24 hours.

## QUESTION: Does my entire household need to be tested to ensure they are not positive following my positive COVID-19 antigen test?

ANSWER: No. If others in your household do not have COVID-19 symptoms, they do not need to be tested. However, if they experience symptoms, they also should be tested.

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