

With widespread testing, New Yorkers pin hopes on virus antibodies

29 April 2020, by Catherine Triomphe



In New York—one of the worst-hit areas in the world with 17,000 confirmed or probable COVID-19 deaths out of 157,000 confirmed cases—the question on everyone's mind is: Have I already had the virus?

Now-unemployed hairdresser Ariel Krupnik, 32, was among those willing to wait two hours for a \$300 [blood test](#) that could reveal within three to five days whether he has developed antibodies against the coronavirus.

He never had any symptoms. But he thinks his [health insurance](#) will cover the [test](#), and finding out he has already had the virus would be "like a nice little, like, spring gift," Krupnik said.

Ariel Krupnik, 32, visited a branch of the CityMD medical chain in Manhattan to have a coronavirus antibody blood test, to see if he had already contracted an unconfirmed case of the virus

For the first time Tuesday, hundreds of New Yorkers were able to get tested for COVID-19 without having serious symptoms or underlying health issues—hopeful they had already contracted and beaten the potentially deadly disease.

Dozens of people wearing masks—many young and seemingly healthy—waited their turns at branches of the New York medical chain CityMD to find out if they had had the novel [coronavirus](#).

For weeks, tests have been reserved for the most ill or for those most at risk of serious complications.

But now CityMD—which specializes in walk-in consultations—is one of the first organizations to announce that virus and antibody testing would be available to anyone, starting Tuesday.



"I can go help out other people that are having it, you know," Krupnik said.

'Curious'

The motivation is similar for 26-year-old Pauline Guardenti, a French woman who has lived in New York for eight years.

"I saw that we could donate our blood—that's why I'm doing it," she said. "Truthfully, I don't really care if I had it or not. There aren't really enough studies to know if we are immune or not."

Ariela Rubin, 37, usually works as a waitress in a vegetarian restaurant that is now closed due to the pandemic.



French New Yorker Pauline Guardenti, 26, said she was sick in early March 2020 with a fever, cough and loss of smell, and wonders if she had an unconfirmed case of the novel coronavirus

An empty 5th Avenue, usually one of the busiest streets in New York, is seen in Manhattan April 27, 2020

Even if the results are not 100 percent reliable, and even if it is not proven that antibodies confer total immunity, Krupnik said a positive result would mean feeling less compelled to stay inside constantly, only looking forward to his weekly supermarket trip.

And it would mean he might be able to donate blood for the plasma therapies that many hospitals are testing for coronavirus patients.

She said she had symptoms of the virus in February, when most people in New York were not paying much attention to the outbreak of a new virus in China.

Rubin said she is "curious" to know whether she contracted the coronavirus earlier this year.

But the sight of a crowded waiting room on Tuesday made her nervous—for fear of contagion in case she had not actually had the virus—and Rubin said she planned to postpone her visit until the next

day.

With tests available to nearly everybody, authorities in New York hope to be able to better track the spread of the disease, an important step in drawing up plans for how economic activity—currently suspended until May 15—can resume in the city.

Recent antibody tests on a sample of 7,000 people indicate that almost one in four New Yorkers may have already been exposed to the [virus](#), according to the state's governor Andrew Cuomo.

That could mean that more than two million of the city's 8.6 million residents have already contracted it, more than 12 times the number of existing confirmed cases.

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