At-home, self-collection tests for COVID-19

What is an at-home, self-collection test for COVID-19?
- These tests are available either by prescription or over the counter (without a prescription) in a pharmacy, online, or in retail stores.
- All steps in these tests are performed at home. Other types of tests require that you collect the sample at home and mail the sample to a lab for processing; those tests are not discussed in this document.
- Most tests require a nasal specimen, and a few tests require a saliva specimen.
- At-home, self-collection tests detect current COVID-19 infection, regardless of vaccination status and symptoms.
- Talk to your health care provider if you have questions about the test or your results.

When can you use an at-home, self-collection test?

- If you have symptoms of COVID-19, test as soon as possible
- If you have a known exposure to someone with COVID-19:
    - If you do not have any symptoms, and regardless of your vaccination status, test 5 days after an exposure.
- Before social and indoor gatherings with others who are not in your household, and before and after travel.

How do you use an at-home, self-collection test?

- Read or watch the manufacturer's instructional video before using the test.
- Wash your hands with soap and water.
- Open the box and follow the manufacturer's instructions included with the test.
- If you do not collect the specimens as directed, your test result may be incorrect.
- For additional instructions, watch: US CDC: How to Use a Self-Test Video

What do the results mean?

For additional instructions, watch: US CDC: How to Interpret Self-Test Results Video

If your test is **positive**:

- It is very likely that you have COVID-19, even if you do not have symptoms.
- Stay home and isolate for at least 5 days.
    - If you have no symptoms or if your symptoms are resolving (including no fever for at least 24 hours without medication) after 5 days, you can leave your house. You must continue to wear a mask around others for at least 5 additional days.
    - If you have persistent or worsening symptoms after 5 days, continue to stay home until you have no symptoms, or your symptoms are resolving AND until 24 hours after your

fever resolves without the use of medications. At that time, you can leave the house. You must continue to wear a mask around others for at least 5 additional days.

- Tell your healthcare provider about your positive result. Stay in touch with them during your illness and seek care if needed.
- Inform close contacts that they could have been exposed to COVID-19.
- If you are concerned that your positive test result might be incorrect, contact your healthcare provider to determine whether additional testing is necessary.
- You do not need to call Maine CDC to report your positive result. Maine CDC does not collect results from at-home, self-collection tests.

If your test is **negative**:

- If you took the test while you had symptoms of COVID-19 and followed all instructions carefully, a negative result means the test did not detect the virus that causes COVID-19.
- However, it is possible for a test to give a negative result even if you have the virus that causes COVID-19. This is called a false negative. Consider repeating a test in a few days, with at least 24 hours between tests.
    - **If you have symptoms of COVID-19, you need to isolate, regardless of your vaccination status.**
    - Contact your healthcare provider about your symptoms, especially if they worsen, and to determine whether additional testing is necessary, and for how long to isolate (possibly longer than 5 days).
- If you took the test while you did not have symptoms and you have a known exposure to someone with COVID-19:
    - You should quarantine, stay home for 5 days, and wear a mask around others for an additional 5 days if:
        - you are not boosted (if eligible for a booster), OR if you completed the primary series of Pfizer or Moderna vaccine over 6 months ago, OR if you completed the primary series of J&J over 2 months ago, OR if you are unvaccinated.
    - You do not need to quarantine, but you should wear a mask around others for at least 10 days if:
        - you are boosted (if eligible for a booster), OR if you are not eligible for a booster but are fully vaccinated, OR if you completed the primary series of Pfizer or Moderna vaccine within the last 6 months, OR if you completed the primary series of J&J vaccine within the last 2 months.
    - If you develop symptoms, you should isolate and test again.

If your test is **invalid or shows an error**:

- The test did not work properly. This can occur for many reasons. Your specimen may not have been collected correctly, or the testing instrument may have malfunctioned. Invalid test results are rare but can occur. If this happens, refer to the manufacturer's instructions included with the test and, if needed, call the manufacturer for assistance.
- Take a new test if one is available.

If my at-home test is negative, can I go back to work or school?

- Schools, businesses, and other employers or facilities may choose whether to accept at-home, self-collection testing results. Please follow-up with your school or employer for more guidance.
- At-home, self-collection tests cannot be used to shorten your [quarantine or isolation](#).

Assistance for Quarantine and Isolation:

- If you need to observe [quarantine or isolation](#), resources are available to assist you with food and groceries, a thermometer, and information about COVID-19 isolation shelters. Visit the [DHHS COVID-19 Community Supports](#) page for more information or call 211. Support is available in multiple languages.