



Arkansas Department of Health

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How to Use COVID-19 Testing

Incubation Period of SARS COV 2: The typical incubation period for COVID-19 is five or six days, but it can range from one to fourteen days with approximately ten percent of cases taking longer than average.

Viral Tests: Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) tests and antigen tests are considered as viral tests.

Point of Care (POC) Testing: Abbott ID Now is a rapid PCR test which can be used as POC; Quidel Sofia and BD Veritor are antigen tests which can be used similarly.

Methods of SARS COV 2 testing:

PCR Tests: PCR tests look for pieces of genetic material of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, in the nose, throat, or other areas in the respiratory tract to determine if the person has an active infection.

- **Advantage:** Highly sensitive, 100% specific, can pick up infection as early as day 3-5 after exposure.
- **Disadvantage:** costly, longer turnaround time (TAT), needs qualified lab, may remain positive for several weeks after infectious period has ended because of high sensitivity.

Antigen Tests: Antigen tests look for pieces of proteins that make up the SARS CoV-2 virus to determine if the person has an active infection.

- **Advantage:** >80% sensitive, 100% specific (compared to PCR), can pick up infection early, point of care, faster TAT, can be done in settings which operate under a CLIA certificate of waiver.
- **Disadvantage:** false negatives can be a problem. A PCR test may be needed for confirmation of a negative test result.

Antibody (Serology Tests): Serology looks for antibodies against SARS-CoV-2 in the blood to determine if there was a past infection. These tests are not indicated for diagnosing current infection.

Guidance for Selection of Test Type

Symptomatic Persons

- Use PCR/antigen tests as soon as symptoms noted. Rapid tests perform well in symptomatic patients. Symptoms include fever, chills, rigors, myalgia, sore throat, cough, headaches, body aches, loss of smell and taste, nausea or vomiting, diarrhea, fatigue, congestion or runny nose, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, etc.
- Point-of-Care (POC) tests, meaning both POC PCR and antigen tests, with negative results should be confirmed with a standard PCR test.

Asymptomatic/Presymptomatic Contacts

- **We do not recommend using antigen tests or POC PCR tests in asymptomatic persons (i.e. screening).** Information is not available on how POC tests perform in asymptomatic/presymptomatic cases.
- PCR testing should be preferred if available; specimens should ideally be collected 3-5 days following exposure for close contacts.

8/13/2020 – This is a living document and may change as new information on testing becomes available. Contact ADH Physician hotline at 1-844-930-3023 with questions. Update on POC negatives added 9/9/2020.

- If viral testing capacity is limited, focus testing on patients with symptoms and household members and other close contacts of positive cases. Remember, close contacts should quarantine for 14 days regardless of negative result.