



What is the difference between a PCR test and Rapid Antigen test? Which test should I take?

PCR Test (sent to lab)

VS.

Rapid Antigen Test (at-home test)

- **Genetic material** = Uses nasal swab sample to detect genetic material (RNA) from the COVID virus
- **Lab** = Must be processed in a lab and can take up to 3 days to get results
- **Highly sensitive** = Test can detect the virus even before you experience symptoms, when your viral load is low. “Viral load” is how much virus is in your body.
- **Can detect virus when you are no longer contagious** = A person can continue to test positive on a PCR test for up to 90 days. This means PCR tests can detect the virus when you are no longer contagious and cleared infection.
- **Antigens** = Uses nasal swab sample to detect protein markers (antigens) on the surface of the COVID virus
- **Home/yourself** = Can be processed at a testing site or done by yourself at home; results in 10 to 20 minutes
- **Less sensitive** = Test may not detect the virus in the early stages of infection, but it is useful to detect when you are contagious (can spread the virus).
- **Detects virus when you are contagious** = A person can continue to test positive on a rapid test for 5 to 7 days, and up to 14 days. If you are testing positive on a rapid antigen test, it means you are likely still contagious.

WHICH TEST SHOULD I TAKE?

PCR Test (Lab) = If you want to be certain you do not have COVID and you do **not** have symptoms, then take a PCR test.

Rapid Antigen Test (Home Test) = If you want to know if you have COVID and **do have** symptoms or were exposed to someone with COVID, then take a Rapid Antigen test.

*For more accurate results, take TWO rapid tests 48 hours apart.