Tri-County Health Department
Serving Adams, Arapahoe and Douglas Counties

Frequently Asked Questions about Rapid COVID-19 Tests

As we learn more about COVID-19, we also learn more ways to test for the virus that causes it. One of those ways is called rapid, point-of-care testing, or just rapid testing. These tests provide results in a very short amount of time and are often available the same day you get tested.

How are rapid COVID-19 tests different from other tests?

- Rapid tests use a swab from the nose or throat. The swab is analyzed at the doctor's office or clinic where you are tested. Test results from a rapid test should be available in one hour or less.
- Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) COVID-19 tests are still the most accurate. PCR tests also use a swab from the nose or throat. PCR tests are not rapid and the swab must be sent to a laboratory to analyze the test. Wait times for PCR test results can be as short as 24-48 hours. If laboratories are overwhelmed it can take a week or more to get results.
- We encourage you to ask any testing provider how long it will take to get your results and how you will be contacted to get your results.

What are the different types of rapid COVID-19 tests available?

- **Molecular:** Molecular tests diagnose COVID-19 based on detection of the virus's genetic material. The rapid molecular test is highly accurate, but the supplies for this test can be limited.
- **Antigen**: Antigen tests diagnose COVID-19 based on detecting different parts of the virus. Antigen tests are best used on people who have had COVID-19 symptoms for a few days. However, for people who want to get tested and do not have symptoms, antigen tests have a higher chance of missing an active infection. If you do not have symptoms but got a negative antigen test, your health care provider might order a molecular test to make sure you don't have COVID-19.

When can rapid antigen testing be useful?

Rapid antigen testing can be useful to quickly help determine if you have COVID-19. Antigen tests with positive results are usually highly accurate. However, negative results may need to be confirmed with a molecular test. If you don't have symptoms of COVID-19 but need to be tested, a molecular test may be the better test to use.

Where can I go to get rapid testing?

Rapid testing is widely available in the Denver Metro Area. Many urgent care centers offer rapid testing. We encourage you to call the site before you go to find out if they offer rapid testing.

To find a location near you, visit the 2-1-1 website. Enter your zip code in the search bar and the results will sorted so that the sites closest to you will appear first.

What questions should I ask the site that is conducting rapid testing?

- What type of rapid test are you offering molecular or antigen?
- Is the rapid test being offered authorized by the FDA?
- Is the rapid testing covered by insurance?
- Which insurances does the test site accept? You should also check with your insurance company before you are tested that the site and test will be covered.
- Are there any additional costs associated with the testing that may not be covered by my insurance?

What if I am being tested for travel?

Some states and countries require a negative test before entry. Often, these tests must be completed within 24-72 hours before arrival. In some cases, the tests must be a molecular test and rapid antigen tests will not be accepted. Find out which type of test the travel location will accept. It is a good idea check with your airline before you go to make sure you can enter/exit your destination easily. Learn more about traveling at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Travel page.