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COVID-19 Antibody Testing FAQ's for Patients

What is an antibody test?

When you have an infection, your body makes proteins called antibodies that circulate in your blood. Antibodies help your body fight against pathogens (germs), such as the coronavirus COVID-19. An antibody test identifies these antibodies in your blood. A negative COVID-19 antibody test means that you do not have significant levels of antibodies for the COVID-19 coronavirus in your blood.

Does a COVID-19 positive antibody test mean that I'm immune?

The short answer: It is too soon to say.

The long answer: COVID-19 is a *novel*, or a new, type of coronavirus, and there is a lot to be learned about it. However, it's important to note two things.

First, research indicates that there may be a large number of false positives – having a positive antibody test when you actually do NOT have antibodies present (potentially up to 50 percent) even for the most accurate tests on the market when the overall occurrence of the disease in our population is low as it is now. That means the test may falsely indicate the presence of antibodies in your blood. This may change if/once the disease becomes more widespread in the region. However, even if the test is accurate in predicting the presence of the antibodies in your blood, right now, we don't know if this really has any value.

Second, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), there is not enough evidence right now to suggest that people who have recovered from COVID-19 and have antibodies are protected from becoming infected again. While research is being conducted to determine whether the presence of antibodies indicates immunity for the COVID-19 virus, scientists have concluded that it's not safe to rely on the test to make decisions about treatments.

The bottom line is you should not use a positive antibody test result to assume you can relax physical distancing/precautionary practices (such as wearing a mask to protect others) since you cannot be certain that you are immune from COVID-19.

Does West Cecil Health Center offer COVID-19 antibody testing?

The short answer: Yes



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The long answer:

We understand the desire to have information about immunity to COVID-19, even if the results are not entirely clear. Also, these tests have been heavily marketed directly to patients and in the media.

For this reason, West Cecil Health Center offers blood-based antibody tests. To request a test, please contact our office. Your provider will arrange for you to receive the necessary referral orders for bloodwork at an approved lab. Testing will be done by Quest or LabCorp, as designated by your insurance provider.

How long does it take to receive results?

Usually within a week.

Do you recommend I get the COVID-19 antibody test?

The short answer: No, not yet.

The long answer: It is important to understand that the antibody test cannot tell you with great accuracy if you have been exposed to COVID-19. And we do not yet know if the presence of antibodies indicates immunity.

A negative test means the test didn't detect antibodies in your bloodstream and they probably/likely are not there, but it is not a 100 percent certainty of being negative (meaning you have not been exposed).

It is our responsibility to empower patients with the most up-to-date information regarding antibody testing, as well as provide access to the best available testing platforms. Although major organizations like the WHO, CDC, and the State of Maryland do not endorse using these results due to insufficient data about the reliability of the tests, we are aware that many patients are still interested in undergoing antibody testing.

Are my results being reported or shared anywhere?

Individual results will not be shared with anyone, but de-identified (meaning you are not personally identified) aggregate data may be used to inform epidemiologic studies, like what the health department does.

Can an antibody test be used to determine if I'm currently infected with COVID-19?

The short answer: No.



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The long answer: Antibody tests look for antibodies that the body makes *after* exposure to the virus. Because it takes time for your body to make antibodies, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) does not recommend using an antibody test to diagnose COVID-19.

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