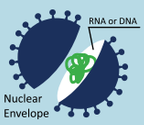
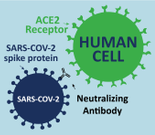
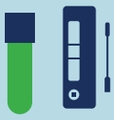
TYPES OF CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) TESTS

Last Updated: July 15, 2022

TEST TYPE	NAAT (e.g., PCR) NAAT: Nucleic Acid Amplification Test PCR: Polymerase Chain Reaction, a type of NAAT test	ANTIGEN TEST Antigen: a substance that causes your immune system to produce antibodies against it
Purpose of test:	Diagnosis of an active SARS-CoV-2 infection (COVID-19)	
What it detects:	 Genetic material from the virus (RNA)	 Proteins on the surface of the virus
How it's collected:	 In most cases, nasal swab, throat swab or saliva	In most cases, nasal or throat swab
Speed of results:	Usually 24-72 hours, depending on lab capacity	Usually 15-30 minutes
Convenience:	Requires trained personnel and laboratory analysis for test results	Instant test results can be read at home, school, or child care
When it's most useful:	Accurately diagnose or rule out active COVID-19 infection The test is so sensitive that an individual may continue to test positive for up to 90 days after infection, so it is not recommended for anyone who has recently had COVID-19 NAAT (e.g., PCR) tests are more sensitive than antigen tests. When an individual has symptoms of COVID-19, it is recommended to confirm a negative antigen test result with a negative NAAT (e.g., PCR) test result	Rapidly diagnose active COVID-19 infection If an individual recently had a COVID-19 infection, the antigen test can help to determine when they no longer have an active infection Antigen tests are less sensitive than NAAT (e.g., PCR) tests. When an individual has symptoms of COVID-19, it is recommended to confirm a negative antigen test result with a negative NAAT (e.g., PCR) test result
How test results are shared with DC Health:	Laboratory reports test results to DC Health	Individual should report positive test result to DC Health using the online self-reporting portal: coronavirus.dc.gov/page/rapid-test-result-submission-portal
How test results are shared with schools and child care facilities:	If the individual is tested outside of a school or child care sponsored testing program (e.g., an individual is tested at home or a healthcare facility), the individual should immediately report any positive test result directly to the school or child care facility and follow any instructions that are provided by the school or facility	

Need a Test?

- Pick up and drop off a free, at-home NAAT (e.g., PCR) testing kit at any of the sites listed on coronavirus.dc.gov/testyourself
- Pick up a free rapid antigen test or go to a District-operated walk-up site listed on coronavirus.dc.gov/testing
- Go to a District-operated COVID Center site listed on coronavirus.dc.gov/covidcenters
- Contact your primary healthcare provider or pharmacy that offers testing

Families may also access the federal government distribution of free rapid antigen tests by mail. Residential households in the US can order at-home tests, without shipping fees, at covidtests.gov or for more information call 1-800-232-0233.

Additionally, beginning on Jan. 15, 2022, rapid at-home tests purchased at pharmacies, retailers and online are eligible for free or for reimbursement through private health insurance. The White House announced that residents can have up to eight FDA-authorized at-home over the counter COVID-19 test kits reimbursed per enrolled person in the plan per month. More tests can be reimbursed if a patient's doctor deems the kits necessary. Depending on an individual's health insurance plan, tests can either be picked up directly for free at the point of sale or reimbursed by the health insurer. Families with questions are encouraged to reach out to their health insurance provider. More information is available from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services: www.cms.gov/how-to-get-your-at-home-OTC-COVID-19-test-for-free