What You Need to Know About Testing and Treatment for COVID-19

How COVID-19 Can Affect the Body

COVID-19 is caused by a type of virus called a coronavirus. Once infected, many people can have no symptoms or mild illness and recover fairly quickly. But for some, COVID-19 can be severe and even deadly. It can be especially dangerous if you have certain health conditions such as a weakened immune system, obesity or overweight, cancer, diabetes, or certain lung, heart, blood vessel, nerve, or brain conditions. If you're 50 or older or haven't been vaccinated against COVID-19, you're also more likely to get very sick.

Anyone can get COVID-19 at any age and the virus can damage many different organs and body systems. Because of this, anyone who becomes infected can have long-lasting symptoms, complications (additional problems), and post-COVID conditions. Post-COVID conditions -- sometimes called "long COVID" -- are a wide range of new, returning, or ongoing health problems that you can have for weeks or months after first being infected. Even people who only had mild illness or no symptoms at all and those who didn't test positive or even know they were infected can have long COVID.

Testing for COVID-19

If you have COVID-19 symptoms, you should get tested right away. If you were exposed to the virus but don't have symptoms, you should wait 5 days before testing. Testing too soon may give you inaccurate results.

Types of COVID-19 viral tests that check samples from your nose or throat to see if you have a current infection include:

- **PCR (polymerase chain reaction) tests**. These tend to be the most reliable whether you have symptoms or not. But you should not use them if you tested positive in the last 90 days

- **Antigen tests**. These often give results in 15 to 30 minutes, but can be less accurate than PCR tests and may not find an early infection, especially if you don't have symptoms. Self-tests or at-home tests are often antigen tests

A **positive** COVID-19 viral test result means the virus was found in your body and you have a current infection. A **negative** result means the test didn't detect virus. But you may still have an infection and may need to test again in 48 hours. With any test, be sure to follow the instructions closely in order to get the most accurate results possible.
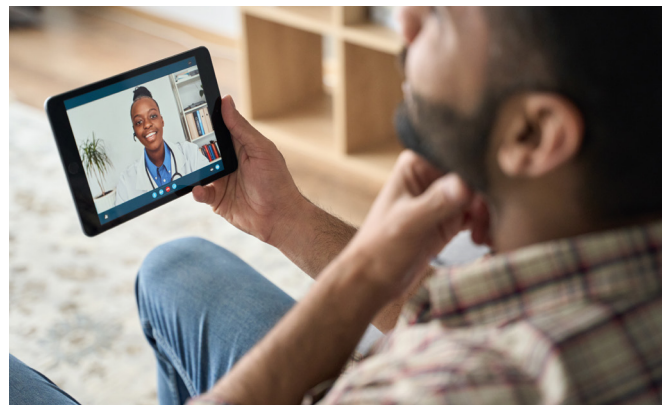
Treatment for COVID-19

Medicines that can lower your chances of getting sick enough to be in the hospital (hospitalization) and death have been authorized to treat mild to moderate COVID-19 in certain people who are more likely to have severe illness.

These include:

- **Antivirals** to help stop the virus from making more viruses (replicating) in your body
- **Monoclonal antibodies** that bind to specific areas on the virus to stop it from attaching to and entering (infecting) your healthy cells

All treatments can have side effects, so be sure to ask your doctor or a healthcare team member about any that may happen with the treatment that you're getting.

Talk to your doctor about if they recommend treatment for you. It will be important to contact them right away because, if treatment is recommended, you will need to start it within a certain number of days after you first get symptoms.

Questions you can ask your doctor and healthcare team about COVID-19 can include:

What should I do if I'm exposed to the virus and when should I get tested?

Am I at a higher risk for severe illness?

If I get COVID-19, what treatments might I be eligible for, when would I need to start them, and what are their possible side effects?

Where can I find more information and resources?