
PRIME COVID-19 Screening and Diagnostic Tests (6-30-2020)

A global pandemic caused by the Sars-CoV-2 virus has placed a strain on the healthcare system. As the world attempts to re-open, the need to understand the re-opening risks would include understanding the several types of laboratory tests that are available.

Different types of testing available:

PCR (nose swab test at the lab):

Reverse Transcriptase (RT)-PCR tests are performed by obtaining a swap of respiratory secretions and specimen are transported to a certified lab. The PCR tests specifically for the genetic material of the Sars-CoV-2 virus that causes COVID-19. The lab may have two distinct methods for obtaining these results. Rapid result desktop machines have very limited availability and sacrifice certain accuracy. The traditional lab methods of PCR testing are done with greater accuracy but labs have experienced backlogs that may take anywhere from 2 to 10 days to report. The PCR test is used as the confirmatory (diagnostic) test for COVID-19, i.e. if you have the active disease or not.

Antibody Serology Tests (blood test at the lab):

Antibody tests are performed on the blood obtained from a simple blood draw and sent to a certified lab. The results of the test are available in 1-2 days depending on the speed of the lab. The test attempts to detect antibodies to the Sars-CoV-2 virus, which may take several days after initial symptoms to become detectable.

Antibody Quick Test (rapid finger stick):

The quick tests are performed on the blood drops obtained from a simple finger stick. The technician places the droplets of blood on a test strip. The results can be read on-location within minutes. The quick tests for antibodies produce similar answers as the lab antibody tests; however, the quick tests are not nearly as “accurate” as the lab antibody tests, and CDC has advised that all quick screen tests are NOT recommended as a diagnostic test for any purpose, i.e. a negative test does NOT mean that you do not or did not have the disease and vice versa.

PRIME Recommendations:

PRIME’s mission is to ensure the health and safety of all workforces. PRIME recommends testing in the following manner:

1. Anyone with COVID-like symptoms should get a PCR test.
2. Anyone with concern they have had and recovered from COVID-19 can get an antibody test.
3. Anyone who needs testing to indicate they do not currently have or have low risk of passing COVID-19 disease should get a PCR test.

COVID-19 Screening Flow Chart

