

NYC COVID-19 Serosurvey Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

To register for the survey or learn more, please visit: [FirstSeroSurveyNYC.com](https://www.firstserosurveynyc.com)

Or text keyword 'TestNYC' to 78378



New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (NYC Health Department) is conducting a large-scale serologic survey, or serosurvey, in collaboration with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. This serosurvey will be administered to first responder, public safety, medical examiner and healthcare workers, and staff who work onsite in healthcare and first responder settings. This survey is designed to learn more about coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) and its impact on our communities.

About the Serosurvey

What is a serosurvey?

A serosurvey is one way to learn how a disease affects a community. The serosurvey involves testing participants' blood for antibodies, special proteins produced in response to an infection. By giving a sample of blood and answering some questions, you can help us better understand COVID-19, including how the body responds to the virus (called SARS-CoV-2) that causes COVID-19, how often the virus causes an infection with symptoms, frequency of specific symptoms, and risk factors for disease. It can also help us estimate how many people may have already been infected with the virus. Additionally, the information we learn could help in the development of treatments and vaccines and other prevention tools. **These tests are important for public health but are difficult to interpret for personal health. A positive or negative antibody test should not change your efforts to prevent COVID-19, nor should test result be used to decide whether you go to work.**

Why am I being asked to take a serosurvey test?

As a first responder, public safety, health care worker, or support staff, you are more likely to have been in contact with people who have had COVID-19. Testing people who have been on the front lines will give us important information about disease prevention and transmission.

Do I need to participate in the serosurvey?

No. Your participation is voluntary.

Are there any negative consequences if I don't participate?

No. Your employer will not be given a list of participants. If your employer learns from you or others that you did not participate, they cannot take any negative action against you for your decision not to participate. You can decide if you want to share your results with your employer or others.

Who is eligible to participate?

The survey is being sent to first responder, public safety, health care workers, and support staff who work onsite in healthcare, medical examiner, and public safety settings. If you received the email, you are potentially eligible to participate. The first step of the process is to answer some basic screening questions. If you have been sick or tested positive for COVID-19 using a swab or saliva test in the last two weeks (based on the date you were tested by your provider), or don't have a cell phone or email address with which to access the survey and test results, you cannot participate.

Why can't people who have been recently sick or tested positive for COVID-19 participate?

People who have been sick or tested positive for COVID-19 on a swab or saliva test in the last 2 weeks cannot be tested accurately for antibodies. This is because antibodies take time to develop after infection, so antibody testing will not be accurate for someone who is sick or was recently sick.

If you are sick, you should not go to work and must remain home as much as possible. You should only leave home for essential medical care, which may include getting a swab or saliva test for COVID-19, and to get basic needs like groceries, if you have no other way to get them. See nyc.gov/health/coronavirus for more information about what to do when you are sick, when to get medical care, and when you can leave home.

If I previously tested positive for COVID-19, am I still eligible to participate?

Yes, if you were tested at least two weeks ago. We want people who were confirmed to have COVID-19 using a swab or saliva test to participate so we can learn more about how the body responds to the virus, such as how long after infection antibodies can be detected.

What does participation in the serosurvey involve?

First, you will be asked to complete online screening questions. Participants who meet the screening criteria will then be asked to complete an online form to give your permission to be included in the serosurvey and for you to answer additional questions using a web-based system. The survey includes questions on basic demographic information, your role in the workplace, whether you have certain medical conditions, symptoms you may have experienced, and other information to help us better understand the virus. Upon completion of the questionnaire, depending on which agency you are with, either you will be able to choose a specific date and time to have your blood drawn at a site in or nearby your workplace or you will receive a message that your agency will coordinate outside of the digital workflow and you will be notified separately. You will then receive your result through a secure link in approximately 3-4 days. **To participate in the study and see you if you qualify, please visit: FirstSeroSurveyNYC.com, text keyword 'TestNYC' to 78378, or use the QR code at the top of this document.**

If I am unavailable during the assigned date and time, can I reschedule?

There will be multiple opportunities for participation; however, they may not be at the same location.

Is testing free? Will my health insurance be billed?

The test is free and your insurance will not be billed.

Logistics and Human Resource Questions

Where are the testing sites?

Most testing sites will be in or nearby first responder and public safety agencies and hospitals. Additional testing sites may be offered depending on interest.

How long will it take to get tested?

Upon arrival at the testing site, the process should take about 10-15 minutes.

Do I need permission from my employer to get tested?

If you are a City employee and the test is during your work shift, you should check with your supervisor to make them aware that you want to be tested and to ask for permission to be away from work. You should use sick leave if you need to take time off work.

If you work for a private hospital or organization, you will need to consult with your employer.

If I am not scheduled to work on the testing day/time, will I receive overtime or compensation time?

If you are a City employee, no, the test is voluntary and not employment-related. If you are not a City employee, consult with your employer.

Should I wear personal protective equipment (PPE) when I go to get tested?

You should wear a face covering. No other PPE is needed. As a reminder, all New Yorkers are required to wear a face covering when they leave home and cannot maintain at least 6 feet of distance from others.

About the Antibody Blood Test

What will my blood be tested for?

Serology testing checks for antibodies. The test that will be performed on your blood sample is designed to detect antibodies to SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19.

The test used in this survey does **not** diagnose a person who is currently infected with COVID-19. Nor does a positive test mean that you are immune to SARS-CoV-2.

What are antibodies?

Antibodies are special proteins that the body produces to help fight off infections and are made in response to an infection. They can be produced even if a person has few or no symptoms. It generally takes some time after infection for antibodies to be produced and become detectable in blood. Antibodies are generally detectable after a person has recovered from the infection.

Sometimes antibodies protect us from getting the same infection again, but **we do not know whether this is true for COVID-19**. We also don't yet know how quickly antibodies are produced when someone has COVID-19 or about likely differences in the amount and type of antibodies people produce in response to infection. Antibodies are only part of the complex immune system in our bodies that works to fight off infections.

What is the difference between antibody tests and the tests used to diagnose COVID-19?

The serosurvey test is a blood test. It tests for antibodies to see if you had COVID-19. It cannot be used to check for current infection (i.e., whether you are currently sick).

The test for COVID-19 is performed by inserting a swab (similar to a long Q-tip) into your nose or throat. Recently, we've also started testing saliva. These tests are used to find out whether you currently have COVID-19.

Is the blood test safe?

The test sample is obtained by drawing blood from a vein. The risk of complications is extremely low and is the same as when you have blood drawn at your medical provider's office.

Your blood will be drawn by trained staff wearing appropriate PPE. Recommendations for physical distancing and surface disinfection will be followed to avoid exposure of individuals to COVID-19 during procedures.

Where will my blood be sent for testing?

Blood samples will be transferred to Quest Diagnostics, the laboratory partner that we have contracted with for this initiative. After initial testing, the remaining blood specimen will be sent to the CDC. The CDC will receive de-identified blood specimens — meaning your personal information will not be directly linked with your sample and the CDC will not be able to identify you.

Why is my blood sample being sent to the CDC after testing?

The part of your blood sample that is left over after testing for antibodies will be stored at the CDC. Keeping your sample is necessary in case the results of this first test need to be verified or new tests become available. One reason we may need to retest is if a person's blood sample is positive for antibodies, but then they develop COVID-19 infection after their sample is taken. In such a case, CDC needs to confirm that the blood sample was truly positive for antibodies. The CDC will not have your personal information and so will not contact you directly with any future results. The NYC Health Department would link your sample number with your personal information and contact you with results relevant to your health, if necessary.

What if I don't want my blood sample stored?

Keeping your blood to retest for antibodies is part of making certain the testing quality is high. Therefore, consenting to storing your blood sample for possible retesting is required to participate in the survey.

You will also be asked if your sample can be used for future studies related to COVID-19. Consenting to use your blood sample for these other types of future studies is **not** required for participation.

How will I get my test result back?

Results will be available within 3-4 days. Your test results will be provided through our contracted laboratory partner, Quest Diagnostics. You will be sent an email to the email address you provided, alerting you that your test results are ready. You will be directed to a secure patient web portal known as MyQuest where you can log in to see your results.

Meaning of Test Results

What does a positive test result mean?

A **positive** test result means that antibodies were detected in your blood sample. This most likely means that you were infected with the virus that causes COVID-19 at some point in the past. However, it is also possible you did not have COVID-19 and the antibodies detected were from an infection with a related virus. This is sometimes called a false positive.

A positive test result does not mean you are immune to COVID-19 or that you can't get it again.

Sometimes the antibodies developed in response to an infection protect us from getting that same infection again. We do not yet know whether this is true for COVID-19. Continue all measures recommended by the NYC Health Department to prevent spreading the virus. Continue to wear appropriate protection at your work, clean your hands often, wear face coverings, and maintain 6 feet of physical distance when possible. Do not change these efforts based on your test result.

What does a negative test result mean?

A **negative** test result means that antibodies were not detected in your blood sample. This can have several possible meanings. Most likely it means that you have **not** been infected with COVID-19.

However, it could also mean that you were infected with COVID-19 but:

- There has not been enough time for antibodies to develop; **or**
- Your body did not produce enough antibodies for the test to be able to detect them.

If I test positive, is it safe for me to be around my family and others?

A positive test means that you likely had COVID-19 at some point in the past. Given the amount of time that has passed, you are likely no longer contagious from that infection. However, we still don't know whether you can get COVID-19 again. You should thus continue to practice physical distancing and good hand hygiene to protect yourself and others.

If I test positive, does that mean my family was exposed to the virus and may have been infected?

Family and other household members are at increased risk of COVID-19 given the nature of shared living space. However, this does not mean your family had the virus.

Can my family get tested?

We are not able to test family members at this time. Your family members should speak with their medical provider if they have questions about getting tested.

Who should I call if I have questions about my test results?

If you are having trouble obtaining your test result, a dedicated helpline for the serosurvey has been setup to answer your questions: **833-670-0250**. If you have questions that are about your test result or your personal medical history, you should speak to your medical provider.

Will my test results affect whether I can go to work?

No. Whether you have antibodies or not will **not** prevent you from going to work. A positive or negative test should not be used to make any decisions about going to work or not by you or your employer.

What should I do after I get my test result?

It is important to remember that we do not yet know whether having antibodies to COVID-19 will prevent you from getting the infection again. As such, whether your test result was positive or negative, it is still critical to keep taking measures to avoid getting infected and spreading infection.

- Continue to follow steps for prevention at home and at work, such as cleaning your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use hand sanitizer that has at least 60% alcohol.
- Use recommended PPE at work and continue to follow recommended cleaning and disinfection practices.
- Continue to follow physical distancing at work and when not at work, including staying home as much as possible and staying at least 6 feet from others when outside your home. You must also continue to use a face covering when outside your home and physical distance cannot be maintained.
- Continue to monitor your health.
 - Be aware of the symptoms of COVID-19. The most common symptoms are fever, cough and shortness of breath. Others include chills, muscle aches, loss of taste or smell, sore throat, and headache. More information on symptoms is available at nyc.gov/health/coronavirus.
 - Do not go to work if you become sick.
 - More information about what to do when you are sick and when to get emergency care are available at nyc.gov/health/coronavirus.

Privacy and Confidentiality

Who will get my test results?

Your results are confidential and will only be released to you and New York City and State health authorities, as required by law. There are strict laws in place protecting your confidentiality and restricting how health authorities can use and share your information.

The CDC and other researchers will see **de-identified** test results – that means they will get test results for everyone, but will not receive your name, contact information or any other information that could be used to identify you.

Will my employer get my test results?

No. Individual results will not be shared with your employer. Only a summary of all the results of the serosurvey will be shared.

How will you make sure my privacy is maintained?

There are strict laws in place protecting your privacy and confidentiality. Only trained laboratory and administrative personnel will have access to your blood sample and personal information. Your test results will be shared with New York City and State health officials in a secure manner. The websites we are using to take your information and share test results are encrypted, as are the text messages and links you will receive. The computer programs and databases are kept behind firewalls and have advanced security precautions.