

Antibody Testing information - general ASC audience

Please note, this information relates only to antibody testing.

We have launched an at-home antibody testing service which is available to all paid staff in the adult social care sector in England.

What is an antibody test?

Antibody tests are used to detect antibodies to the COVID-19 virus to see if you have previously had the virus. Our understanding of the body's immune response to the virus is limited, and we do not currently know how long an antibody response lasts, whether you can be re-infected, nor whether having antibodies means you cannot transmit the virus to others.

The test does not tell you if you currently have the virus.

What are antibody tests used for?

This at-home antibody testing service is supporting surveillance studies that are helping us to understand COVID-19 and how it has spread in the adult social care sector. By participating and taking a test you will be contributing to this effort.

An antibody test result can only tell you whether or not you have had the virus in the past and developed antibodies. It does not tell you if you currently have the virus.

Therefore, regardless of the result of an antibody test, you must continue to comply with government guidelines, including wearing PPE and social distancing.

Guidance on PPE and information about working safely in adult social care sector can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/overview-of-adult-social-care-guidance-on-coronavirus-covid-19>

Who can register for an antibody test?

At-home antibody testing is now available across England to anyone employed in adult social care. Personal assistants who provide for the care and support needs of adults are eligible, as are staff working in residential care, domiciliary care, extra care, supported living, and local authority adult social care departments.

Antibody testing has been available to social care staff in some areas in England through the NHS. This at-home antibody test provides a new route to access an antibody test, giving greater flexibility and choice. You should only take one version of the test.

If you are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 or have received a positive swab test, you should wait **3 weeks** before registering for an antibody test.

How do these tests differ from regular COVID-19 swab tests?

Antibody tests are different to COVID-19 swab tests. Swab tests tell someone if they currently have COVID-19, whereas antibody tests tell someone if they have previously had COVID-19 and have developed antibodies. They do not tell you if you currently have the virus.

If you are currently experiencing symptoms of COVID-19, you should follow government guidelines and order a COVID-19 swab test for free here: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/testing-and-tracing/get-a-test-to-check-if-you-have-coronavirus/>

Will my antibody test results affect whether I need a flu jab?

COVID-19 and flu infections are different. The flu jab is a safe vaccination offered every year for free on the NHS to help protect people at risk of flu and its complications.

It is important to have a flu jab because it helps to protect the vulnerable people you work with. Also, research shows that if you catch COVID-19 and flu at the same time, you're more likely to be seriously ill.

If your antibody test shows that you have had COVID-19 in the past, you still need to have a flu jab. Whether you have had COVID-19 or not, the flu jab is still safe.

Information about the flu jab and how to get it can be found here: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/vaccinations/flu-influenza-vaccine/>

Taking the test

To sign up for an at-home antibody test, you will need to register online here: <https://www.gov.uk/get-coronavirus-antibody-test>

After registering, you will receive a text message containing a code which will allow you to sign up for a test. All the equipment needed for the test, along with instructions and a link to a video guide, will be provided in the kit sent to your home.

Results of the test will be communicated to you via text.

Guidance and a video explaining how to take the antibody finger-prick test can be found here: www.gov.uk/taking-antibody-blood-sample.

Wellbeing support

As frontline care workers, we recognise the mental and physical challenges that COVID-19 may have placed on you. It is important that you access support if you need it. A service called Our Frontline offers support from trained volunteers plus resources to help look after your mental health. This service can be accessed here: <https://www.mentalhealthatwork.org.uk/ourfrontline/>

More information

If you have further questions about the service, please call 119.