

Testing FAQ's

Why can't anyone that wants a test have one?

Testing is most useful when patients have symptoms, to verify current infection and initiate contact tracing for others exposed to the infected person. Testing patients without symptoms is helpful when there is known outbreak or clusters of infection, and for people at high risk for contracting the virus. This would include frontline workers, healthcare staff, people living and working in congregate settings, and people impacted by health disparities and inequities.

Because we have a finite amount of testing capacity, we balance providing virus testing to asymptomatic patients with maintaining enough inventory to react to an outbreak. We continuously pursue opportunities to increase our testing capacity, so we can meet the needs of the Tribal membership and our patients.

What do the viral test results mean?

A positive COVID-19 test means that the individual tested has an active COVID-19 infection. They may, or may not, be showing symptoms but need to follow the CDC guidelines for self-quarantine and isolation.

A negative COVID-19 test means a person was not infected at the time of the test or that they were too early in the infection for a positive result. It does not mean that an individual can't get sick. An individual could be exposed after the test and then become infected with COVID-19. An additional test would need to be administered to determine a later infection.

Why can a volunteer employee with a negative result go back to work, but a close contact with a negative test has to quarantine for 14 days?

When an employee volunteers for a screening test, they don't have any symptoms and have not been exposed to a positive case (that they are aware). This is a surveillance test because it is an attempt to identify a positive person that has no symptoms or known contact. If they are negative, there is no reason to believe there is a risk they will develop symptoms.

When a close contact is identified, it has been confirmed that the person was within 6 feet of a known positive case for over 15 minutes. If this person has a negative, those results are only for that given point in time and the virus could still be developing. Because this person still has a risk for developing the virus, they quarantine to contain any possible spread.

If my mom/dad/friend/co-worker is identified as a close contact and needs testing, why can't I get tested since I've been around them?

Close contact is defined as anyone that is within 6 feet of a confirmed positive case for longer than 15 minutes. Until the mom/dad/friend/co-worker test positive, there is no exposure established and no indication that testing is needed. If mom/dad/friend/co-worker tests positive, then any of their close contacts may need testing.

When can I return to work if I have been identified as a close contact?

The CDC recommends that close contacts to be tested.

If you don't have any symptoms and are negative, the CDC recommendation is to quarantine for 14 days from last close encounter with the positive person and to monitor for symptoms. After 14 days, if no symptoms develop, CDC recommends re-testing (if available) before returning to work.

If you do have, or develop symptoms, you should follow up with your healthcare provider. The general guidance is you can return to work when at least 10 days have passed since symptoms started, and at least 24 hours have passed without a fever—without using fever-reducing medication, other symptoms have improved, and you have had 2 negative test results at least 24 hours apart.

When can I return to work, if I have been confirmed positive?

If an employee has a confirmed positive infection but has no symptoms, they should quarantine for 14 days and monitor for symptoms. If no symptoms develop, they can return to work after the 14 days with a negative test result.

If you are positive and do have symptoms, typically--you can return to work when at least 10 days have passed since symptoms started, and at least 24 hours have passed without a fever—without using fever-reducing medication, other symptoms have improved, and you have had 2 negative test results at least 24 hours apart.

Why is there such an emphasis on hand washing, face masks and social distancing?

Because the best way to prevent getting the virus is to avoid exposure, and the virus is thought to spread mainly from person to person via respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs, sneezes or talks. These droplets can land in the mouths and noses of people nearby or possibly inhaled; so washing hands to remove any droplets, wearing a face covering to prevent the droplets from gaining entry into mouths and noses and keeping distance so droplets can't reach anyone can help prevent the spread to everyone around. Repeating these prevention tactics is to make sure we don't become complacent and continue to protect ourselves, our loved ones and everyone around us.