



# About Your COVID-19 Test

This information explains the test to check you for COVID-19, including risks and benefits.

## About COVID-19

COVID-19 is a viral illness that can affect your lungs and airways. It's caused by a new virus called SARS-CoV-2. COVID-19 can cause mild to severe respiratory (breathing) problems.

COVID-19 can easily be passed from one person to another. It can spread in droplets in the air or left on surfaces after a sick person coughs or sneezes. It can also spread if someone touches a sick person and then touches their eyes, nose, or mouth.

COVID-19 causes cold or flu-like symptoms. These may include:

- Fever (temperature above 100.4 °F or 38 °C)
- Cough
- Breathing problems (such as shortness of breath or chest tightness)
- Body aches
- Chills
- Fatigue (feeling very tired or having very little energy)
- Lost sense of taste or smell
- Headaches
- Diarrhea (loose or watery bowel movements)

For more information about COVID-19, read our resource *Frequently Asked Questions About Coronavirus (COVID-19)* ([www.mskcc.org/pe/coronavirus](http://www.mskcc.org/pe/coronavirus)).

## About Your COVID-19 Test

Your healthcare provider tested you for COVID-19 using the MSK COVID-19 Real-Time RT-PCR, cobas® SARS-CoV-2 Real-time RT-PCR Diagnostic Panel, or Xpert® Xpress SARS-CoV-2– Cepheid. These tests use samples from the back of your nose and throat to check if you have the virus that causes COVID-19.

Your healthcare provider tested you for COVID-19 because:

- You had cold or flu-like symptoms, such as a fever, cough, and breathing problems.
- You live in or have recently traveled to a place that has a lot of cases of COVID-19.
- You have been in close contact with people who have or had COVID-19.

Testing your samples will help find out if you have COVID-19.

COVID-19 tests haven't been approved by the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) yet. The FDA made these tests available because of the COVID-19 pandemic emergency.

## Risk and Benefits of COVID-19 Testing

All tests come with risks and benefits. Some possible risks of the COVID-19 test include:

- Possible discomfort while your healthcare provider is collecting samples from the back of your nose and throat for your test.
- Possible incorrect test results. Sometimes tests can tell you that you have a virus when you don't. This is called a false positive. They can also tell you that you don't have the virus when you do. This is called a false negative. Your healthcare provider will review your test results and your medical history when

planning your care.

Some possible benefits include:

- Helping your healthcare provider plan your care.
- Limiting the spread of COVID-19 to your friends, family, and people in your community.

## About Your COVID-19 Test Results

A positive COVID-19 test means the test showed you have COVID-19. A negative COVID-19 test means the test didn't show you have COVID-19.

### Positive test results

If you have a positive COVID-19 test result, it's very likely that you have COVID-19. If you have COVID-19, it's important that you take special care to avoid spreading the virus to others.

### **If you're an inpatient (patient staying in the hospital) and tested positive for COVID-19:**

- You will be kept apart from other people as much as possible to protect other patients and staff from getting COVID-19.
- Your healthcare providers may enter your room less often and stay for shorter periods of time than what you've experienced in the past. They may also call your hospital room phone or cell phone to check on you. This is because the less time they spend in an isolation room, the lower the risk that your healthcare providers and their other patients will get sick from the virus.
- Staff will wear gowns, masks, eye protection, and other equipment to keep the virus from infecting other patients.
- Staff may ask you to wear a mask while they're in your room.
- You will need to wear a mask, a clean hospital gown, and gloves if you need to leave your room for a test or a procedure.

You should also follow [CDC guidelines](#), such as social distancing and [washing your hands](#) thoroughly. For more information, read our resource *Frequently Asked Questions about Isolation for COVID-19* ([www.mskcc.org/pe/isolation\\_covid](http://www.mskcc.org/pe/isolation_covid)).

### **If you're an outpatient (patient not staying in the hospital) and tested positive for COVID-19:**

- Stay home except to get medical care.
- Separate yourself from other people in your home.
- Wear a cloth face covering.
- Cover your cough and sneezes.
- Avoid sharing personal household items, such as dishes, drinking glasses, cups, eating utensils, towels, or bedding.

You should also follow [CDC guidelines](#), such as social distancing and [washing your hands](#) thoroughly. For more information about managing COVID-19 symptoms, read the resource *Managing COVID-19 at Home* ([www.mskcc.org/pe/covid\\_home](http://www.mskcc.org/pe/covid_home)). Your caregiver should follow the instructions in our resource *Managing COVID-19 at Home: Information for Caregivers* ([www.mskcc.org/pe/covid\\_home\\_caregivers](http://www.mskcc.org/pe/covid_home_caregivers)).

## **Negative test results**

If you have a negative COVID-19 test result, it's very unlikely that you have COVID-19. Even if you have symptoms, a negative test result usually means that COVID-19 didn't cause your symptoms.

It's important that you talk with your healthcare provider to help you understand the next steps you should take. You should also continue to follow [CDC guidelines](#), such as social distancing and [washing your hands](#) thoroughly.

For the most up-to-date information on COVID-19, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ([www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)) and the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene ([www1.nyc.gov](http://www1.nyc.gov)) websites.

## **Resources**

For more information, read the following resources:

- *About Your COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2) IgG Antibody Assay*  
([www.mskcc.org/pe/covid\\_assay\\_test](http://www.mskcc.org/pe/covid_assay_test))
- *About Your COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2) RNA Assay EUA Combined*  
([www.mskcc.org/pe/covid\\_eua\\_test](http://www.mskcc.org/pe/covid_eua_test))

If you have any questions, contact a member of your healthcare team directly. If you're a patient at MSK and you need to reach a provider after 5:00 PM, during the weekend, or on a holiday, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit [www.mskcc.org/pe](http://www.mskcc.org/pe) to search our virtual library.

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