Memorial Sloan Kettering
Cancer Center

# About Your COVID-19 Test

This information explains tests that show if you have COVID-19.

Memorial Sloan Kettering (MSK) provides testing for COVID-19. These tests check if you have the virus that causes COVID-19. Your healthcare provider will order the test that's right for you based on your situation.

If your healthcare provider tells you to have a saliva test, follow the instructions below:

- Within 60 minutes (1 hour) of your test, do not eat a full meal (breakfast, lunch, or dinner)
- Within 30 minutes of your test, do not eat or drink anything
- Within 10 minutes of your test, do not rinse your mouth

## 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'll 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'll 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 .

**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). Your caregiver should follow the instructions in our resource *Managing COVID-19 at Home: Information for Caregivers* (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) and the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (www1.nyc.gov) websites.

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.