

## Testing and Respiratory Viruses

### What to know

Testing is an additional prevention strategy that you can choose to assist in making decisions to further protect yourself and others.

### An additional prevention strategy to further protect yourself and others

Testing for respiratory viruses can help you decide what to do next, like getting [treatment](#) to reduce your risk of severe illness and taking steps to lower your chances of spreading a virus to others. There are various types of tests for respiratory virus infections. Antigen tests ("self-tests" or "rapid tests") usually return results quickly (around 15 minutes). PCR tests are normally conducted by a healthcare provider. Although antigen tests are usually faster, they are not as good at detecting viruses as PCR tests. This means that you might get a negative result with an antigen test, but actually be infected with the virus.

### How it works

Tests can help you find out if you are currently infected with a certain respiratory virus. While testing doesn't change how likely you are to catch or spread respiratory viruses, or how severe your illness might be, it can provide useful information to help you make prevention or treatment choices.

### Steps you can take

#### *Individuals can*

- Plan in advance of any illness so you can be ready to get tested quickly, particularly if you are someone who could benefit from treatment for respiratory viruses.
- [Order](#) free COVID-19 antigen tests through the U.S. Postal Service or purchase them from many retailers.
- Antigen tests can be used for screening before gathering with others, especially to help protect people in your life who have [risk factors for severe illness](#). However, false negatives are possible; false positives are uncommon.

#### *Organizations can*

- Provide employees with paid time off to seek testing for respiratory viruses, as needed.

### Key times for prevention

All of the prevention strategies described in this guidance can be helpful to reduce risk. They are especially helpful when:

- Respiratory viruses are causing a lot of [illness in your community](#).
- You or the people around you were recently exposed to a respiratory virus, are sick, or are recovering.
- You or the people around you have [risk factors for severe illness](#).