

Fact Sheet: Understanding Your COVID-19 Tests and Results from the C.A.T.C.H. the Virus Study

University of Maryland School of Public Health

What is the novel Coronavirus and COVID-19?

Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a respiratory illness caused by a virus (more specifically, a new coronavirus) first detected in Wuhan, China in December 2019. The virus is spreading from person to person and has travelled around the world through many other countries. The novel virus, called SARS-CoV-2, is closely related to the virus that caused Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome in 2003 and is a distant relative of four common coronaviruses that cause the common cold and have infected humans for hundreds to thousands of years. For additional information see the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>.

Why is the University of Maryland doing COVID-19 tests?

Tests for COVID-19 recently became available as part of our routine battery that we use to test for influenza and common cold viruses in the C.A.T.C.H. the Virus Study. This test also includes tests for the four common coronaviruses and many other infections. Adding this test to our standard tests will allow us to detect and monitor the new virus if it starts spreading in our community.

What tests are being used at the University of Maryland to detect COVID-19?

We are using research laboratory testing methods on samples to see if you have been infected with the COVID-19 virus or other respiratory viruses. The testing will be done in a research lab at the School of Public Health in College Park as part of our routine tests for cold and flu viruses. The test is part of a standard commercial kit designed for research use only, produced by Thermo-Fisher Scientific. It is the same test that was used by the Seattle Flu Watch study to identify community spread of COVID-19 in Washington State.

Because this is a test for research purposes, the results cannot be used to diagnose you or make medical decisions.

The research tests are not FDA-approved for making a diagnosis, and the research laboratory is not a certified clinical laboratory.

Why will my sample be tested using research methods?

We are researching respiratory viral infections. We are including COVID-19 screening as part of our research along with influenza, adenovirus, and many of the viruses that cause common colds. We are using research methods because we are not a clinical lab, and we are not offering you diagnosis or treatment.

What are the known risks and benefits of the research test?

Benefits: Your results may give you early warning if your samples need additional testing for SARS-CoV-2. The test results could also help public health officials identify and limit the spread of this virus and may help scientists identify how the virus spreads.

Risks: You may be a little uncomfortable when we draw your blood and swab your nose. The test for SARS-CoV-2 is new, and our lab can't tell you for sure if you have the virus.

If the test is positive, does it mean that I have COVID-19?

If you have a positive test, it is likely you have COVID-19. There is a chance the test can give a positive result that is wrong (false positive). We will immediately report our results to the State and County Health Departments for follow-up. They will decide if they want to do additional testing. We ask that you self-isolate and take precautions not to spread the infection to others while we contact the health departments. We also recommend that you contact your personal medical care provider and inform them of the results of this research test.

Please see the CDC guidance on preventing spread of COVID-19 in homes and communities:
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/guidance-prevent-spread.html>

If the test is negative, does it mean that I do not have COVID-19?

If you have a negative test, it is still possible you have COVID-19. Testing a person can happen too early or too late to detect infection. There is also a chance that the test is wrong (false negative), meaning that you could still have COVID-19 even though the test results are negative.

What if I don't want to be tested?

Remember that you are always free to opt out of testing and withdraw from the study at any time – all participation is voluntary.

For more information see these websites:

<https://umd.edu/virusinfo>

<https://phpa.health.maryland.gov/Pages/Novel-coronavirus.aspx>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>