

Updated May 12, 2020

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COVID-19 Antibody (Serology) Testing

As your healthcare partner, our goal is to ensure you are informed with the most up-to-date information available. As guidelines surrounding COVID-19 (coronavirus) are developing and evolving rapidly, we continue to work alongside the CDC and local governing agencies to provide the highest quality of care to our patients and community.

You may have heard about serology testing, also known as antibody testing, for COVID-19. With new and continuously changing COVID-19 information available from so many sources, we look to provide you with the facts available at this time, and an understanding as to what this means for your care and testing options at EvergreenHealth.

As with all clinical testing and screening, EvergreenHealth follows evidence-based protocol and guidelines to ensure all patient testing is medically necessary both as a responsible healthcare provider and as a partner to our patients.

Based on a review of Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the Infectious Diseases Society of America (IDSA) and Washington Department of Health recommendations, EvergreenHealth is not recommending or performing routine antibody testing at this time.

Serological/Antibody Testing Q&A

Q. What is antibody testing?

An antibody test detects antibodies present in the blood when the body is responding to a specific infection. The test detects the body's immune response to the infection caused by the virus rather than detecting the virus itself.

Q. Are serology (antibody) tests recommended for making a diagnosis of COVID-19?

No, not at this time. The [U.S. Food and Drug Administration \(FDA\)](#) is not aware of an antibody test that has been proven to diagnose COVID-19. Tests to determine whether or not you currently have the virus – polymerase chain reaction or PCR-based tests, more commonly known as COVID-19 tests – are currently the only validated tests (see information on COVID-19 testing below).

Q. Can an antibody test determine if someone has already had COVID-19?

In partnership with the Department of Health, our Infectious Disease physicians believe antibody testing cannot currently determine whether or not someone has experienced a past infection of COVID-19. There are too many unknowns; these "unknowns" suggest that the public shouldn't rely on antibody tests to determine when to safely resume normal activity.

Q. Is EvergreenHealth performing serology tests for COVID-19?

At this time, EvergreenHealth is not performing nor recommending serology tests for COVID-19 for several reasons:

- *The antibody response in infected patients remains largely unknown, and the clinical values of antibody testing have not been fully demonstrated. If we cannot be sure of the accuracy of a test, you could think you were not immune when you were. Or worse, you could think you were immune when you are not. The imperfect results could be a big disappointment to people who are looking toward these tests to help them return to something resembling a normal life.*
- *Experts predict more time (several months or more) is needed to determine whether immunity lasts several weeks, several months, several years or even a lifetime.*
- *Food and Drug Administration (FDA) doesn't set standards for these kinds of tests, but even those that meet the government's informal standard may produce many false answers and provide false assurances.*
- *A positive test is exceptionally difficult to interpret because the performance of these tests is not well known. False positive tests may occur due to potential cross reactivity with common cold coronaviruses (Ex. HKU1, NL63, OC43, 229E).*
- *Until more evidence about protective immunity is available, serology results should not be used to make "return to work" decisions or decisions regarding the need for personal protective equipment.*

Q. Why shouldn't someone get the antibody test – just in case it does work?

If we cannot be sure of the accuracy of a test, you could think you are not immune when you are. Or worse, you could think you are immune when you are not. The antibody test may produce many false answers and provide false assurances. Experts predict more time (several months or more) is needed to determine whether immunity lasts several weeks, several months, several years or even a lifetime. Across the globe, there is much learning ahead to help us better understand COVID-19, as well as how and what types of tests prove effective in helping support patient and community health.

Q. What could produce a “false” positive antibody testing result?

A positive test is exceptionally difficult to interpret because the performance of these tests is not well known. False positive tests may occur due to potential cross reactivity with common cold coronaviruses.

Q. When is serological testing useful?

Serological tests may be better suited for public health surveillance, vaccine development and identification of plasma donors to study investigational treatments.

Q. Where can I find more information on antibody testing?

We recommend several trusted resources:

- *The Infectious Diseases Society of America (ISDA) released a study on the [current state of antibody testing](#) on May 4, 2020.*
- *The Washington State Department of Health included information on antibody testing in its [Testing Guidance for Healthcare Providers](#).*

COVID-19 Diagnostic Testing

EvergreenHealth continues to offer diagnostic testing for COVID-19. We offer this in our respiratory clinic, our drive-thru clinic, our Emergency Department and to patients within our hospital.

COVID-19 testing is based on each individual patient's medical history and symptoms.

Your [EvergreenHealth Medical Group](#) provider will work with you to determine if a COVID-19 test is in the best interest of your health. If you do not currently have a primary care physician, you may call our COVID-19 dedicated Healthline at 425.899.3555 to be screened for symptoms to see if you qualify for a COVID-19 test in our drive-thru location. (Drive-thru tests are by appointment only.)

COVID-19 Testing Q&A

Q. What is the preferred test for COVID-19?

The preferred diagnostic test for COVID-19 is a PCR-based test. A PCR-based test is a rapid technique for detecting specific DNA or RNA sequences in viruses. If you are currently experiencing symptoms suggestive of COVID-19 infection, please contact your EvergreenHealth Medical Group provider for more information. If you do not currently have a primary care physician, you may call our COVID-19 dedicated [Healthline](#) at 425.899.3555.

Q. Where do people get tested?

If your EvergreenHealth Medical Group provider recommends testing, you'll be set-up for an appointment at our drive-thru location. Drive-thru testing is by appointment only.

Q. What are the current symptoms of COVID-19?

Per the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#), these symptoms may appear 2-14 days (on average 5-6 days) after exposure to the virus:

- *Fever*
- *Cough*
- *Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing*
- *Chills*
- *Repeated shaking with chills*
- *Muscle pain*
- *Headache*
- *Sore throat*
- *New loss of taste or smell*



Some people may experience:

- Aches and pains
- Nasal congestion
- Runny nose
- Diarrhea

Q. Are there emergency warning signs for COVID-19:

If you develop emergency warning signs for COVID-19, please seek medical attention immediately. Emergency warning signs include but are not limited to:

- Trouble breathing
- Persistent pain or pressure in the chest
- New confusion or inability to arouse
- Bluish lips or face

This list is not all inclusive. Please consult your medical provider for any other symptoms that are severe or concerning.

Q. If someone tests positive for COVID-19, what should they do?

If you test positive for COVID-19, or are caring for someone who tested positive, please [follow these protective steps](#).

Thank You

We are grateful to partner with you in your good health. We encourage you to continue practicing social distancing (staying six feet apart from others) and to wear a mask when out and about. Additionally, please don't become complacent with good hand hygiene – wash your hands often and for at least 20 seconds. Finally, to ensure you're reviewing the most up-to-date information on COVID-19, please visit our COVID-19 Information page at www.evergreenhealth.com/coronavirus.

Additional Online Resources

IDSA (Infectious Diseases Society of America)

1. IDSA Releases Antibody Testing Primer (Updated 04/20/2020)
<https://www.idsociety.org/news--publications-new/articles/2020/emphasizing-need-for-more-information-idsa-releases-antibody-testing-primer2/>
2. Infectious Diseases Society of America today released [a primer on the current state of SARS-CoV-2 serology tests](#) and the research and policy questions they raise. (Updated 05/04/2020)
<https://www.idsociety.org/globalassets/idsa/public-health/covid-19/idsa-covid-19-antibody-testing-primer.pdf>

Washington State Department of Health

1. Interim COVID-19 Testing Guidance for Healthcare Providers (Updated 04/28/2020)
<https://www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/1600/coronavirus/Interim-2019NovelCoronavirusQuicksheetProviders.pdf>

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