

Coronavirus Test: What You Need to Know

As more and more people are concerned about catching or spreading COVID-19, the disease caused by the new coronavirus, many want to be tested. But different testing criteria, limited supplies and other factors mean that not everyone can get a test, particularly people with no symptoms and minimal risk factors.

Can I get tested for COVID-19?

Coronavirus tests must be ordered by a doctor. If you feel like you may have COVID-19, it's important to call your doctor or care facility and follow guidelines on what to do. If you have a cough, a fever or difficulty breathing, the doctor most likely will first test you for the flu or other potential causes of these symptoms.

In deciding whether or not it's appropriate for you to be tested for the new coronavirus, the doctor will consider risk factors, such as your age, your general health, where you live and work, your travel history and your symptoms.

You are most likely to get a COVID-19 test if you have symptoms and you are:

- **Experiencing severe symptoms** such as very high fever or breathing difficulties that require care in a hospital
- **Living with certain health conditions**, such as:
 - Diabetes
 - Heart disease
 - Chronic lung disease
 - Chronic kidney disease
 - Immunosuppressive therapy
- **Working in a health care environment** and providing direct care to patients.

How is the coronavirus test performed?

A healthcare professional will put on protective clothes, mask and face shield, and then collect samples. This involves swabbing the inside of the person's nose with a skinny swab that is long enough to reach the nasopharynx, the upper part of the throat, behind the nose. The mildly uncomfortable process, the same used to test for influenza, takes just a few seconds.

A healthcare professional then packages the samples according to guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and then the samples are shipped to a laboratory. Some hospitals, such as Johns Hopkins, have testing labs on site. The laboratory tests the specimens for the presence of the new coronavirus, which causes COVID-19. The doctor reports the test results to the patient and to the public health authorities if it is positive

What happens if I test positive for coronavirus?

If your test shows that you've been infected, your doctor will advise on next steps. Most cases of the illness are mild and can be managed at home.

Why can't everyone get a coronavirus test?

Some areas in the U.S. are experiencing a delay in getting tests for the new coronavirus. In other areas, guidelines for whom to test are very narrow. The test is currently time consuming to give, and, at present, takes several days to get results.