

# The Facts About COVID-19 Tests



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COVID-19 tests are critical to measuring the spread of the disease and determining how to handle the pandemic. The two types of COVID-19 test – serology tests and viral tests – serve different purposes and have different limitations.

**Knowing the facts about these tests is essential to making decisions that are best for the public's health.**



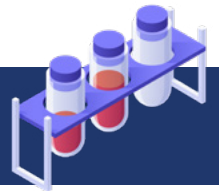
## The Two Test Types

### Question

### Viral Test



### Serology Test



**What is the test?**

A viral test is an oral or nasal swab or saliva test that looks for **evidence of an active viral infection**. There are two major types: a PCR test and an antigen test.

A serology test is a blood test that looks for **evidence of someone's prior infection** with the virus.



**What does the test do?**

PCR tests look for the **presence of a virus's genetic material**, while antigen tests look for **specific proteins on a virus's surface**. Antigen tests produce results more quickly, but may be less sensitive.

The test provides evidence that someone may have been exposed to the virus in the past, potentially even if they did not have symptoms, by **detecting antibodies specific to the virus**.



**What doesn't the test do?**

Viral tests do not indicate **whether someone was infected in the past**.

The test **does not diagnose an active infection or identify who is protected from reinfection** (antibodies have not been proven to guarantee immunity).

**FDA**

**How does the FDA handle the test?**

The FDA formally **evaluates these tests prior to use**.

The FDA **does not formally evaluate these tests prior to use**, though a few have Emergency Use Authorization.

To learn more about COVID-19 testing, visit [coronavirus.jhu.edu/testing](https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/testing)