If you have symptoms of COVID-19 or have been identified as a close contact, you should be tested for SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, and you may need to quarantine based on your school district and local health department’s recommendations.

Here are some common questions and answers about COVID-19 tests that are available in your local community.

1. **WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF COVID-19 TESTS TO IDENTIFY AN ACUTE INFECTION?**

   The two types of common COVID-19 tests are molecular [i.e., PCR (polymerase chain reaction) or another type of NAAT (nucleic acid amplification test)] and antigen tests.

2. **WHAT IS A MOLECULAR, NAAT OR PCR TEST?**

   Molecular - polymerase chain reaction (PCR) or other NAAT methods – tests detect genetic material from the SARS-CoV-2 virus that causes COVID-19 disease. Generally, the most accurate molecular tests must be sent to a laboratory for analysis and usually take 24 hours or longer for results to be returned. However, some molecular tests can be used for rapid testing in clinics or emergency departments, at home, or at school.

3. **WHAT IS AN ANTIGEN TEST?**

   COVID-19 antigen tests look for pieces of proteins that make up the SARS-CoV-2 virus to determine if the person tested has an active infection. Antigen tests do not necessarily need to be sent to a lab to be analyzed. Results from these tests are typically available quickly (often within 30 minutes). People with COVID-19 symptoms and a negative COVID-19 antigen test should get a molecular test to confirm the negative results, as the antigen test can give a negative test result for some individuals who are actually infected.
4. HOW ACCURATE ARE THE RESULTS OF MOLECULAR AND RAPID ANTIGEN TESTS?

Molecular tests are the gold standard for detecting SARS-CoV-2 with the greatest accuracy.

Rapid antigen tests have reduced sensitivity and specificity compared to molecular tests. Antigen testing can be beneficial for diagnostic testing after exposure or symptomatic testing to identify an active COVID-19 infection. Antigen testing does not perform as well in individuals who are asymptomatic or have no COVID-19 exposures and may miss some individuals who are positive.

Of note, a negative test result suggests no current evidence of infection; however, the result represents a snapshot in time around the time of specimen collection and the individual could be positive later.

5. WHICH TEST SHOULD I TAKE SO I CAN RETURN TO SCHOOL?

Check with your local school or school district; school districts work closely with their local health departments.

Most districts are aligned with the CDC recommendations that an antigen or molecular test can be used to test an individual who has new symptoms potentially consistent with COVID-19 disease.

For individuals with no symptoms, but who require a test after a recent exposure, a molecular test is preferred.

Of note, testing is not recommended to determine if someone infected with COVID-19 has had resolution of their infection; criteria for return to school after infection is not based on testing but on time from disease acquisition and on symptom resolution.

6. WHERE ARE THE TESTS AVAILABLE?

COVID-19 tests are available at a variety of locations in your community, including pharmacies such as CVS, select Walgreens and Walmart testing sites, local test sites, no-cost community testing events, and more. Tests may also be available at your school. Visit ncdhhs.gov/GetTested to find a testing site near you.

7. I DO NOT HAVE HEALTH INSURANCE. CAN I STILL GET TESTED?

Yes. If you do not have health insurance, you can receive a no-cost test at:

- Your local school if they are participating in a testing program
- Your nearest Federally Qualified Health Center. These community-based health care providers receive federal funds to provide health services in communities across North Carolina.
- Your local health department if you cannot be tested using any of the above options.
- Any local CVS and select Walgreens and Walmart testing sites. Check their websites for additional details
- Other no-cost testing sites at ncdhhs.gov/gettested