



November 12, 2021

Antibody Testing

IMA Public Health Committee Facts and Guidance

1. An antibody test **does not** tell you whether you are immune to the virus that causes COVID-19 disease.
2. An antibody test **may** indicate whether you have been infected or vaccinated; testing is currently used in research settings but is not recommended for individual decision-making, such as whether to get vaccinated
3. Even those with antibodies should still be vaccinated if they previously had COVID-19 and should still receive booster vaccinations when they meet the criteria for booster shots. Vaccines after having COVID-19, boosts immunity so you are less likely to get COVID-19 again.
4. If you have a positive antibody blood test, and you develop symptoms, you should still get a COVID-19 nasal swab test to identify if you have an acute COVID-19 infection. A positive nasal swab test will unfortunately indicate that you have COVID-19 reinfection.
5. A positive antibody test is not a reason to not get the COVID-19 vaccine.
6. One day, we may have a blood test that will show whether you are immune and protected from COVID-19, but we don't have that test today.
7. Vaccines are still the most effective and certain way to keep yourself and others safe from COVID. If you want to learn more on [natural immunity vs. vaccine immunity, visit the recent IMA Public Health Guidance](#).

*LabCorp says, "This test should not be used to determine the level of immunity you have."

*CVS says, "The test cannot determine whether or not you can spread the virus to others. It should not be used for diagnostic purposes or to confirm immunity."

The [CDC](#) says *antibody testing is [not currently recommended](#) to determine if you are immune to COVID-19 following COVID-19 vaccination. Antibody testing should also not be used to decide if someone needs to be vaccinated.*

Background on antibodies and related testing

Some people suggest that is it possible to tell who is immune and protected from getting COVID by checking a blood test to see if the person has antibodies. Unfortunately, that **will not** work. Why not?

1. Not all antibodies are the same, and it is likely that there are only certain ones that actually protect you from getting infected. We don't yet know the level and type of antibodies that provide you with immunity from COVID.

- a. What does this mean? It means that you might have antibodies that will show up on a test, but perhaps not the right antibodies or enough of them to protect you from getting COVID. This is true even if you already had COVID or were vaccinated.
2. Antibody levels to this coronavirus are reported in different ways with different manufacturers of the tests. Therefore, even if we knew what level of antibodies would be protective for one test, it would not be possible to compare antibody levels from that test with another. There is no approved standard test for COVID-19 immunity.
3. Antibody levels change over time. A test done just days after infection or vaccination may not detect antibodies. Antibody levels rise and are usually detectable by three weeks after infection or vaccination. Antibody levels decline with time, which may, but doesn't necessarily mean that the person has declining immunity to the virus.
4. The immune system is very complicated. Antibodies only represent one part of the immune response and don't tell the whole story. Cells that are part of the immune system are thought to play an important role in defending against the virus and this element of the immune system is harder to measure.