FAQs Antibody Testing for UW Medicine employees, trainees and faculty

What is an antibody test?

A COVID-19 antibody test is a blood test that can tell if you previously had COVID-19 and have since recovered. The test involves having your blood drawn to check for the presence of a particular antibody your body makes when it is fighting the virus. These antibodies appear in your bloodstream after you have been infected.

Is this test the same as the nasal swab test?

No, the test is not the same and does not check for the presence of the virus that causes COVID-19. This antibody test will tell you if you had COVID-19 in the past regardless if you experienced symptoms. The antibody test should not be used to diagnose someone who has symptoms now.

What is the purpose of antibody testing?

For individuals, it is unlikely to change how a person is managed medically and does not change the need for precautions such as physical distancing, hand hygiene, or masking in public or at the workplace. Currently, the test is most useful to help us understand how much the disease has spread in the community and potentially predict if a second surge of cases is likely to occur.

How do I sign up for the test?

Your manager, director or physician leader will reach out to you via email to let you know when you can fill out an online survey that will determine if you can be tested for the COVID-19 antibody. The first wave of employees to be tested are those working on COVID-19 units including those that provide direct clinical care and those that provide essential services to support patient care on those units; employees working in Emergency Departments and COVID-19 testing sites as well as COVID-19 screeners and safety officers because of their direct work with patients who are positive for COVID-19.

Over the course of the following weeks, we will offer this to employees working in acute and critical care units, hospital-based clinics and those employees working in positions that have direct interaction with patients; lab employees, and those working in facilities and engineering and UW Medicine health professional students.

A third group of employees to be offered antibody testing are those employees who work in buildings without clinical activity and administrators not engaged in direct patient care.

If you have symptoms of COVID-19 [fever, new cough, new shortness of breath, diarrhea, chills, body aches, loss of smell/taste, sore throat, headache, runny nose], you cannot take the antibody test and will instead be directed to schedule an appointment for a nasal swab to test for active COVID-19.

Once you have completed the survey, you will be directed to a scheduling tool to select a date, time and location for a blood draw.
Where will testing take place?

As part of this project, phlebotomy labs across the system will be available for blood draws. You will select a particular site when you are self-scheduling. The UW Neighborhood Clinics will offer testing at their clinics only to their employees at this time, but may open up times for others depending on the demand. We expect there to be changes in how, when and where we offer testing as we learn more about this process.

How long will it take to test everyone?

Though we do not know how many eligible individuals will choose to take the test, we anticipate that it could take several months to accommodate scheduling for the required blood draw with our existing phlebotomy resources.

The lab where I work can’t see me for a few weeks. What can I do?

Though we recommend individuals try and schedule at their primary work location, you can schedule your blood draw at a variety of sites that might have more availability. In addition, the labs will open up new schedules each evening, so be sure to check back each day to see if more slots are open and available.

How will I get my test results?

You will be given a QR code to use to access your test results. You should expect to be able to review your results within 24 hours.

What if I lose my QR code?

Contact your Employee Health Clinic at https://www.ehs.washington.edu/workplace/employee-health-center. For the UW Neighborhood Clinics, call 206.520.5536.

What if I don’t want to take the test?

Testing is strictly voluntary.

Is there a cost for the test?

You will incur no cost if you choose to take the test.

Will the results of this test be in my medical records?

No, test results will not be recorded in your medical record. Employee Health will maintain a record of the test results as they do for other employee health data.
What will UW Medicine do with my test results?

As with other employee health information, test results will be included in the employee health record system and will be kept confidential in line with how employee health data is normally protected. UW Medicine plans to track the total numbers of employees receiving the antibody testing and the positivity rate, as we do for COVID-19 diagnostic testing. UW Medicine may share this information with public health if requested (as is being done with positive nasal swab testing for active disease).

If I already tested positive for COVID-19 should I still be tested for antibodies?

Yes. If you are more than 3-4 weeks out from your positive test and have returned to work per UW Medicine policy, you can schedule an antibody test.

If I test positive for the antibody, does that mean I am immune?

Currently, we do not know if a positive antibody test means that you are protected from being re-infected and should not be viewed as immunity to COVID-19. The test results will not change what precautions you need to take to prevent exposure to COVID-19 such as masking, physical distancing and practicing hand hygiene. We hope to learn more about immunity and what a positive antibody test means in the coming months and will update you when more information becomes available.

If I test negative for the antibody, can I get tested later in the year as part of this work?

At this time, UW Medicine is offering one antibody test for eligible employees, trainees and faculty.

What if I develop COVID-19 symptoms after I have scheduled a blood draw?

You should cancel your appointment and call your provider who may recommend that you schedule an appointment to take a nasal swab to test for active COVID-19 at one of the drive up testing sites.

I have heard that the test has a specificity of 99.9% and a sensitivity of 100%. What does that mean?

The test is 99.6% specific meaning there is only a 0.4% chance of having a false positive result in someone who was not infected with SARS- nCoV-2. All tests can have potential false negative and false positive results, including the UW antibody test, but this testing platform has been evaluated by the UWM Laboratory Medicine team and we are confident of the test’s accuracy.

Will all UW Medicine employees be offered this test?

Employees of the following UW Medicine entities (UWMC, HMC, UWNC, UWP, the School of Medicine, Airlift Northwest) and UW Medicine trainees, will have access to the antibody test.

Can I be tested if I am on furlough?

Yes, employees on furlough can receive the antibody test.
Can my family members be tested for antibodies if I test positive?

Your family members will need to reach out to their primary care provider to determine if they should be tested.