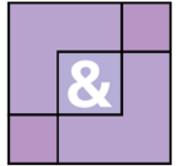




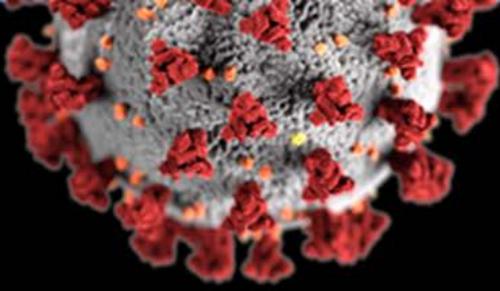
Cheshire & Merseyside
Health & Care Partnership



Coronavirus (COVID-19): Cheshire and Merseyside Antibody testing programme



"Be the reason someone gets better care today"



Cheshire and Merseyside COVID-19 Antibody Testing

Introduction

As part of the national response to COVID-19, antibody testing is now available in Cheshire and Merseyside for NHS staff and some patients.

Laboratory-based tests will be used in the first phase of our antibody testing programme to tell us whether that person has already had the virus. To avoid putting additional pressure on phlebotomy services, we will begin the roll out of antibody testing in NHS settings where blood is already being taken.

Patients who are already having blood taken as part of other tests will be asked whether they would like an antibody test. The test will also be offered to NHS staff regardless of their role, employers will notify staff of where and when testing is available, and how to access the service.

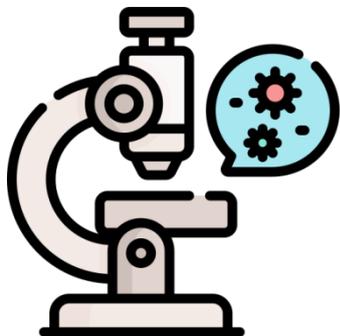
There is no strong evidence yet to suggest that those who have had the virus develop long-lasting immunity which would prevent them from getting the virus again. Antibody testing at this stage is useful primarily to improve our understanding about the spread of the virus.

Key messages

- Antibody testing is a key part of the Government's testing programme and will play an increasingly important role as we move into the next phase of responding to this epidemic.
- In order to better understand the role that an antibody test could play in our response to the epidemic, we need to improve our understanding of how the immune system responds to the virus that causes Covid-19.
- We do not currently know how long an antibody response to the virus lasts, nor whether having antibodies means a person cannot transmit the virus to others.
- Our understanding of the virus will grow as new scientific evidence and studies emerge.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

What is an antibody (or serological) test?



COVID-19 antibody testing is a blood test to look at whether the body has produced an immune reaction (antibodies) to the COVID-19 virus.

Antibodies develop in viral infections as part of the body's attempt to fight the virus. An antibody test can tell someone whether they have had the virus that causes COVID-19 in the past. The test works by taking a blood sample and testing for the presence of antibodies to the COVID-19 virus.

It takes time for the body to produce this response. The tests we are offering in Cheshire and Merseyside will look for the two antibodies (IgM and IgG) that are produced by the body after infection.

How does an antibody test differ to a virus test (PCR test)?

Antibody test:

Antibody tests are used to detect antibodies to the virus as a marker of past infection. A positive test result indicates that a person has previously had the virus and has developed some form of immune response.

PCR test/virus test:

In contrast, a PCR test aims to find out if you **currently have** the virus. A positive result does not necessarily indicate that you will go on to develop antibodies to the virus and an immune response. It is possible that around 10% of people who test positive will not develop an immune response.

What do antibody test results mean?



A positive antibody test demonstrates that someone has developed antibodies to the virus. The presence of antibodies signals that the body has staged an immune response to the virus. This usually happens about two weeks after the first symptoms.

COVID-19 is a new disease, and our understanding of the body's immune response to it is limited. We do not know, for example, how long an antibody response lasts, nor whether having antibodies

means you can't transmit the virus to others. Our understanding of the virus will grow with new scientific studies as evidence emerges.

An antibody test result can only tell an individual whether or not they have had the virus in the past. Antibody tests are also being used currently in surveillance studies, to understand what proportion of the population has already had the virus.

Can this antibody test tell me if I have an infection now or had a recent infection?

The test for antibodies is only reliable for detecting that you had the infection more than two weeks ago.

If you test positive for antibodies, can you ignore lockdown restrictions?



No. There is no evidence yet to suggest that those who have been proven to have had the virus are immune. This is the position of the World Health Organisation.

As the presence of antibodies doesn't not necessarily mean you are immune, you should continue to comply with social distancing measures and government guidelines. All infection prevention and control measures must continue to be in place irrespective of the presence of antibodies.

What does a negative antibody test mean?

For most people a negative test will mean that they have not had the infection, if the test was done more than two weeks after the start of symptoms. However, not all infected individuals make enough antibodies to be detected by the current tests, so, for a small number of people, a negative result may not mean they have not had the infection, especially if there were no symptoms or very mild symptoms.

How will I be informed of the result?

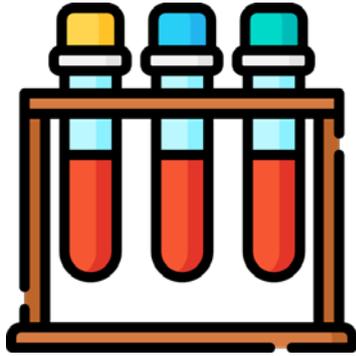


Communication of the result is the responsibility of your employing organisation or for patients, the organisation that provided the test. The results will not go on employment record and your GP should be able to access the result if required and according to local information sharing protocols.

How will my information be used?

The anonymised results across the testing programme will provide information on the prevalence of COVID-19 in different regions of the country and help us better understand how the disease spreads.

Are there any risks to having the test?



There are some risks related to having a blood test, such as feeling dizzy and faint during and after the test but nothing specific to this antibody test. Risks can also include bruising at the venepuncture site. Serious complications such as an infection at the site where blood was taken and phlebitis (swelling of the vein) are possible but generally extremely unlikely.