



COVID-19 Testing Guide and Frequently Asked Questions

4/15/2022, 6/7/2022, 8/2/2022

REVISED: 8/16/2023

8/16/2023 Revision: *California Department of Public Health (CDPH) has updated the definition of a COVID-19 outbreak to be at least 3 cases in a 7-day period.*

Background: Testing for COVID 19 infection continues to be a cornerstone in reducing the spread of COVID and supporting safe worksites for employees and the public. COVID cases persist, and testing continues to play an important role and complements existing effective strategies to reduce the spread of disease. These prevention strategies include staying home if you are unwell, use of appropriate and effective face covering that are required in some settings, and through rapid testing early identification of cases and subsequent isolation to reduce the spread of COVID to others. Booster shots are highly recommended and required in some sectors. Testing also allows for early diagnosis, and possible use of antiviral medications.

The scenarios where testing is required are outlined below, along with answers to commonly asked questions about COVID testing and information on City testing resources and locations.

Definitions:

Close Contact: The updated definition of exposure defined by Cal/OSHA and CDPH recognizes the aerosol spread capabilities of COVID-19. The definition of close contact has been expanded beyond the 6-foot distance of the past. A close contact is someone who has shared the same indoor airspace with a COVID-19+ employee for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or greater in any 24-hour period within or overlapping with the “infectious period. All employees must mask for 10 days after being identified as a close contact.

Infectious Period: Two days prior to the onset of symptoms through ten days after the symptoms first appeared, or two days prior to date test administered if employee never had symptoms.

Outbreak: An Outbreak is defined as 3 or more cases in a 7-day period, (or a major outbreak defined as 20 or more cases in a 30-day period). **Testing is required:** on day 3-5 after the outbreak starts and then weekly until the area is out of outbreak status. An outbreak is resolved when there are one or fewer new cases in a 14-day period.

Recovered COVID infection: Recently recovered from COVID-19 means a period of 90 days after the initial onset of COVID-19 symptoms or, for COVID-19 cases who never developed symptoms, for a period of 90 days after the first positive test.

COVID-19 Test types:

- **Rapid antigen test:** This test looks for the presence of proteins from the COVID-19 virus. Many varieties are offered for self-administration and home use. They do not take a lab for processing and yield results within 15-30 min. Used broadly by schools, for travel, and for sports, it reflects active infection and transmissibility. It can have more false results, usually from testing too early, where it does not recognize an early infection, or an inadequate sample collection. It is more accurate at showing when a person is no longer infectious by giving a negative result after

confirmed infection, whether tested previously by a PCR or rapid test. Departments may order rapid tests through the normal contracting and procurement process.

- **PCR:** (Polymerase Chain Reaction) is a molecular test run in a lab and does not yield immediate results. It recognizes recent infection by identifying the presence of fragments of the virus, has the most accurate and reliable results, and can stay positive for weeks to months even after infection and infectivity have passed. It is not a good test for acute transmissibility (the ability to spread the infection to others). It is the test most regularly used by health care facilities, physician's offices, and CityTestSF. It is a requirement in potential workers' compensation cases.

When to use:

Rapid Antigen Test is recommended for:

- After a close contact exposure, all employees may continue to work but are recommended to test on day 3-5.
- When an employee has developed symptoms.

Rapid Antigen Test is required for:

1. In an outbreak, testing is required on day 3-5, then weekly until outbreak is resolved.
2. In a major outbreak, testing is required twice weekly.
3. For COVID positive employee, who works in the healthcare setting or is a first responder, a test is **required** on or after day five if they seek to leave isolation and quarantine sooner than 10 days.

PCR: Required for: Any workplace-originating infection that may result in a workers' compensation claim. Once PCR result is positive: do not retest again with a PCR for 90 days since it may stay positive even though the person is no longer infectious.

Who can administer:

Testing that is required to allow an employee back to the worksite early from quarantine, or during an outbreak can be self-administered with a home rapid test.

Upload your results into People & Pay:

If you are required to obtain a test for any of the reasons listed above, employees must input their results into People & Pay. Only positive tests, and a negative result for employees ending quarantine early must be uploaded with the photo documentation into People & Pay using the Employee Gateway.

Link to instructions:

<https://sfdhr.org/sites/default/files/documents/COVID-19/Self-Reporting-Test-Results-PeoplePay.pdf>

Frequently Asked Questions

Returning to the worksite:

Can I get tested for a close contact exposure if that exposure was not at work? Yes, in order to have a workplace that is free of COVID, testing between days 3 and 5 after the last exposure is recommended. Unless the employee has COVID-19 symptoms, they should mask and continue to work.

Where are test results recorded? Employees will enter their own test results in the People and Pay system using the Employee Gateway, or with the help of their Department HR professional. The employee will also upload a photo of a home-test kit result or a copy/photo of the lab report if it is positive, or a negative result.

Do I need a PCR if I have a home rapid test that is positive? Share your positive result with your supervisor and upload it to People and Pay. You will need a confirmatory PCR if this was a worksite contracted case and possible workers' compensation claim.

I had a workplace close contact exposure, what leave do I use? A COVID exposure does not require isolation and quarantine, thus you may continue reporting to work, and must stay masked for 10 days from exposure as long as you do not have any symptoms. Sick leave would only be used if you develop symptoms or a positive test.

I am an employee who is required to get a booster, can I keep testing instead of getting a booster? No. Testing is used for employees who are booster eligible but have not yet received a booster. The testing requirement does not extend the deadline for receipt of a booster.

Can my employer require me to come into the worksite for a test? Yes, where tests are required in order to stay at the worksite or to return early after a positive test when you are not having symptoms. Employees who refuse to participate in required testing will not be allowed on site.

COVID tests for symptoms:

What if I develop symptoms? Do not come to work, (or if you feel ill at work, leave work) and seek testing: use a Rapid Antigen test or seek lab testing from your healthcare provider or pharmacy or retail locations.

What test types are allowed? Rapid Antigen tests and PCR are both useful for diagnosing COVID, though the rapid antigen test is preferred due to the quick turn-around of results. Other types of tests such as antibody tests have no role.

When should I do a rapid home test? When you have symptoms. After an exposure, ideally day 3 or later. Testing too soon can give a false negative result.

What if I have symptoms and my rapid home test is negative? If symptoms persist, re-test with a home kit a day or two later or get a PCR test and consult with your own health care provider. Testing too early with a rapid test can be negative when indeed there is an infection.

Where can I obtain a test? In the setting of an outbreak, your department should have rapid tests available, just ask your HR professional. Local pharmacies and markets are well stocked with Rapid Antigen tests. Your health plan may also reimburse you if you had to purchase the Rapid Antigen kit yourself: link <https://sfhss.org/news/health-plan-reimbursements-covid-home-test-kits>.

What if I have had COVID-19 and my test is still positive? PCR tests can stay positive a long time and should not be repeated. Home rapid antigen tests, usually revert to negative, but can also stay positive

for longer. For employees who have a persistent positive antigen (home test) beyond 10 days, if they have no fever and improving symptoms, they may return to work on site and masking should be continued for 14 days.

My work is in outbreak, and I recently had COVID, do I test again? No. Employees who had COVID in the past 90 days do not test during an outbreak unless they develop symptoms. After 90 days have passed, employees must submit to what testing is required at the worksite.

How can I tell when my home test is negative? All kits have 2 lines: one is marked 'C' for control (not COVID), and always will be positive (always makes a line). The other line is marked 'T' for test and is your test results. Even if very faint: it is positive. There is no need to keep testing after day 10 of isolation and quarantine.