UNDERSTANDING COVID-19 TESTING

TESTING FOR THE VIRUS

SAMPLE COLLECTION
A swab is taken from the inside of the nose or back of the throat.

PROCESSING
Molecular tests detect whether there is genetic material from the virus.

POSITIVE TEST RESULT
TRUE POSITIVE
You are currently infected. Almost all positive results are true positives.

FALSE POSITIVE
You are not infected, but test positive (very rare).

NEGATIVE TEST RESULT
TRUE NEGATIVE
You are not currently infected. There is no risk of infecting others.

FALSE NEGATIVE
You are infected, but test negative. Can happen when the test is done too early to detect the disease or when sample collection is poor.

TESTING FOR ANTIBODIES
A blood test detects antibodies to the virus that usually start to appear when a person is recovering. This blood test is not used to diagnose active COVID-19.

Research is underway to find out whether antibodies protect you from future infections.

TESTING ACCURACY DEPENDS ON WHEN YOU GET TESTED

Test accuracy based on a 5 day incubation period from exposure to symptoms

INITIAL EXPOSURE
Days 0-2
Very low virus

-98% not detected*

Those tested too early will be unaware of infection and may infect others.

INCUBATING
Days 0-5
Virus multiplying

-50% not detected*

Up to half of those tested will get a false negative result and may infect others.

SYMPTOMS
Days 5+
Virus plentiful

-10% not detected*

Low false negative rate.

RECOVERING
Days 15+
Virus decreasing

May not be infectious to others

May take longer to recover from severe disease

* Based on preliminary data and expert opinion. Some do not develop symptoms. Test accuracy for asymptomatic cases is unclear as it is not known where they are in the disease timeline.

TESTING FOR THE VIRUS

POSITIVE TEST RESULT

INDIVIDUAL ISOLATES

FALSE NEGATIVE TEST RESULT
UNAWARE OF THEIR INFECTION AND COULD INFECT OTHERS

WORST (DAYS 0-2)

BEST (DAYS 4-8)