## Maryland Department of Health (MDH) COVID-19 Testing Basics

*Learn more about the three most common types of COVID-19 tests available in Maryland*

| PCR or Molecular Amplification Diagnostic | Rapid Point-of-Care (Antigen Diagnostic*) | Serology (Antibody) |
|---|---|---|
| Detects genetic material from the virus | Detects proteins from the virus | Detects antibodies made by the immune system if the virus was present in the past |
| Shows active COVID-19 infection | Shows active COVID-19 infection but may be less sensitive than a PCR test | Shows past COVID-19 infection |
| Best test for highly accurate diagnosis of individual patients and only test recommended in outbreaks | Best used for rapid screening of individuals, especially symptomatic individuals, including those in congregate settings such as nursing homes or dormitories | Only test for confirming past infections (but *does not* confirm immunity to future infection) |
| Samples taken via nasal or throat swab (most tests) -*OR*- saliva (few tests) | Samples taken via nasal or throat swab | Samples taken via finger stick or blood draw |
| Results generally available in 1-2 days<br><br>Most molecular diagnostic tests are run in a lab and take time to transport and process. However, there are also "point-of-care" (POC) molecular diagnostic tests that can provide results within 15-45 minutes | Results can be available in 15-20 minutes<br><br>Results are processed using a POC device located onsite. These tests are commonly called “rapid” tests<br><br>**NOTE:** Antigen tests are generally not as accurate as PCR tests and produce more false-negative and false-positive results than PCR tests | Results available in 1-3 days |
| The most common COVID-19 test<br><br>MDH reports all PCR-confirmed cases on coronavirus.maryland.gov | MDH tracks results | MDH reports aggregate serology data here |

***NOTE:** Every patient and situation are unique. Patients are encouraged to discuss available testing options with a physician before determining which test will work best in their situation.*

*Only rapid antigen tests that have received an Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) -*OR*- that have been independently verified by a Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendments (CLIA)-certified laboratory may be used. As of November 9, 2020, six separate assays have been awarded an EUA through the FDA: Abbott BinaxNOW, Access Bio, Celltrion, Becton Dickinson (BD) Veritor, LumiraDx, and Quidel Sofia. More information is available in the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s *Interim Guidance for Rapid Antigen Testing for SARS-CoV-2*.