



Testing FAQs

1) What is the difference between a nasal swab and an antibody test?

A nasal swab measures viral RNA. A serology (blood) test detects antibodies to the virus. Nasal swab tests are very good at identifying if a person currently has the virus. Antibodies identify if you have had the virus in the past.

2) Can the antibody test be used to screen employees coming back to work?

No, although the FDA and others are working to assess these tests, the majority currently available have not received FDA Emergency Use Authorization (EUA). At this time, antibody testing should not be used to guide release from isolation or for return to work purposes and is not indicated for diagnostic purposes. Having antibodies identified does not necessarily mean that you are protected from Covid-19.

3) What happens if there is a positive antibody test?

A health history would be collected by a public health nurse to determine if the individual had symptoms in the past or currently has symptoms.

4) Who can get a nasal swab test in Massachusetts?

All symptomatic individuals, even with mild symptoms, and close contacts (with or without symptoms) of known COVID-19 cases.

5) Who is considered a “close contact”?

A close contact is defined as being less than 6 feet from a COVID-19 case for a minimum of 10 minutes OR having direct contact with infectious secretions of a COVID-19 case while not wearing recommended personal protective equipment.

6) What does quarantine mean?

Quarantine is used to keep someone who might have been *exposed* to COVID-19 away from others. Quarantine helps prevent spread of disease that can occur before a person knows they are sick or if they are infected with the virus without feeling symptoms. People in quarantine should stay home, separate themselves from others, monitor their health, and follow directions from their state or local health department. The only exception is essential workers who are asymptomatic. But they may have to comply with workplace guidelines. Quarantine is usually a 14-day time frame.

7) What does isolation refer to?

Isolation is used to separate people infected with the virus (those who are sick with COVID-19 and those with no symptoms) from people who are not infected.

8) Can a person be tested if they do not have symptoms?

Asymptomatic individuals can be recommended for diagnostic testing at the discretion of their healthcare provider, a state agency, or an employer. Individuals are encouraged to confirm with their insurance whether the test will be covered.

9) When can a sick employee return to work?

Employees may return to work when the criteria to discontinue home isolation has been met in consultation with healthcare providers and state and local health departments.

10) What if an employee has a family member at home who has COVID-19?

The employer should be notified, and they must follow CDC recommended precautions as advised by their local board of health.

11) What do I do if an employee is confirmed to have COVID-19?

Employers should inform fellow employees of their possible exposure in the workplace but maintain confidentiality as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act

(<https://blog.ifebp.org/index.php/covid-19-confidentiality-medical-information-ada>).

The employer should instruct fellow employees about how to proceed based on the CDC Public Health Recommendations for Community-Based Exposure

(<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/public-health-recommendations.html>).

12) Should everyone be wearing a face mask?

Yes, wearing face covering is the most effective way to prevent the spread of the virus when social distancing cannot be maintained. This includes customers in retail establishments and guests at lodging facilities and in restaurants when not at the table. All housekeeping personnel should wear face coverings indoors at work.

13) Where can testing options be found for employees?

Employees who have a COVID-19 symptom or are a close contact of an individual who is COVID-19 positive should be tested. This testing should be covered by insurance.

Please visit [Barnstable County Department of Health and Environment's website](#) to find a convenient testing site.

This information was compiled by the Barnstable County Department of Health and Environment and Cape Cod Healthcare. It cites information provided by the Centers for Disease Control, Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Bureau of Infectious Disease, and Infectious Disease Society of America.



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