



Interim Guidance for SARS-CoV-2 At-Home Self-Testing

October 5, 2021

This guidance was developed by the San Francisco Department of Public Health (SFDPH) for local use. It is directed to the General Public who may need to use an at-home self-test. It will be posted at sfdcp.org/athomecovidtest.

Summary of SARS-CoV-2 At-Home Self-Test Guidance:

- Testing can help reduce the spread of COVID-19. If you have symptoms or exposure to someone with known or suspected COVID-19, you should be tested regardless of your vaccination status.
- SFDPH supports the use of FDA authorized at-home self-tests, when done correctly, to meet the need of testing in approved scenarios and locations. This document focuses on at-home self-tests, done without a prescription or proctoring by a health care provider.
- These recommendations do not apply to people who work, live, or visit in high-risk settings such as acute or long-term healthcare facilities, correctional facilities, and shelter or transitional housing locations.
- Different rules may apply to schools, childcares, youth sports, and programs for children and youth.

This document provides guidance to the public on what to do **after an authorized at-home self-test has been performed**. This means a test that you do by yourself at home, which is not prescribed by a healthcare provider, proctored, or sent to a laboratory.

There are different ways to get tested. You can be tested by a healthcare provider, at a public health [testing site](#), or using a [self-collection kit](#) (“self-test”) that can be performed at home (“home test” or “at-home test”). Currently available self-tests include antigen and molecular tests, such as polymerase chain reaction (PCR) and other nucleic acid amplification tests (NAAT), or PCR/NAAT, which are used to check for current infection. These tests tell whether you have COVID-19 right now and not that you were infected in the past. The FDA provides information on which [antigen](#) and [PCR/NAAT](#) self-tests are authorized for use.

See your institutional requirements for *types of tests* accepted and if an at-home self-test is an option for your intended use. **Instructions in this document do not supersede your institutional requirements or a healthcare provider’s advice. At-home self-tests may not be approved for official verification purposes, and you still may need confirmatory testing through a healthcare provider.**

Currently, at-home self-tests are not accepted at the following institutions, among others, and therefore this guidance **does not apply to people who work, live, or visit in high-risk settings such as acute or long-term healthcare facilities, correctional facilities, and shelter or transitional housing locations. Different rules may apply to TK-12 schools, youth sports, & programs for youth**; refer to <http://www.sfdph.org/dph/covid-19/schools-isolation-and-quarantine.asp> - testing.

If you have symptoms of COVID-19 or were exposed to someone with known or suspected COVID-19, you should be tested regardless of your vaccination status. Your test result, together with your symptoms and exposure, can determine if you need to isolate or quarantine. For Isolation and Quarantine Guidance in San Francisco, see: <https://www.sfdph.org/dph/COVID-19/Isolation-and-Quarantine.asp>.

When using an at-home self-test, make sure to read the full manufacturer's instructions before using the test. **All instructions must be followed carefully. For instance, some tests ask you to take more than one test within a certain period (serial testing).**

If Your Test Is Positive

If your at-home self-test is positive, you should assume you are infected with COVID-19 and take measures to get care and isolate away from others.

- **Tell your healthcare provider about your positive test result** and stay in contact with them during your illness. If you do not have a provider or need assistance with isolation, reach out to the [COVID Resource Center](#) at 628-217-6101.
- Monitor your symptoms. If you develop symptoms of more severe disease, including trouble breathing, seek medical care immediately.
- To avoid spreading the virus to others, follow [SFPDH's Isolation and Quarantine Guidance](#), which has information for those who test positive with symptoms, as well as for those who have a positive test without symptoms. As much as possible, stay in a specific room and away from other people and pets in your home or place of residence. If possible, you should use a separate bathroom. If you need to be around other people or animals in or outside of your home or place of residence, wear a mask. Don't share personal household items, like cups, towels, and utensils.
- Tell your [close contacts](#) that they may have been exposed to COVID-19. An infected person can spread COVID-19 from 48 hours (or 2 days) before the person had any symptoms or tested positive. By letting your close contacts know they may have been exposed to COVID-19, you are helping protect everyone. You can also tell people anonymously by email/text at www.tellyourcontacts.org.

If Your Test Is Negative

If your at-home self-test is negative, COVID-19 was not detected by the test. However, in certain situations you may need additional testing. Antigen tests may not detect all active infections, so if you are worried you have COVID-19, consider talking to your provider.

- If you took the test **while you had symptoms** and followed all instructions carefully, a negative result means your current illness is **probably not** COVID-19. If you have symptoms and a negative at-home self-test, you probably don't need confirmatory testing if you have a low likelihood of COVID-19. **If you are worried, your healthcare provider can help you decide if you should get a second test. If your provider is worried you may have COVID-19 they may decide to repeat the test at home or at a healthcare facility.**
- While these tests are accurate when used correctly, sometimes a person **without symptoms** can also get a "false negative" result. You could test negative if you took the test too early in your infection. In this case, you could test positive a few days later. **If you are not fully vaccinated and have been exposed to someone who has COVID-19, you should [quarantine according to SFPDH recommendations](#) even if your test is negative.**
- If your at-home self-test is negative, you should follow the manufacturer's instructions for use as some tests are designed to be used in a series, with testing every few days. By testing more frequently, you might detect COVID-19 more quickly and could reduce the spread of infection. **You can find the instructions for different tests on the FDA website ([molecular \(PCR/NAAT\)](#) or [antigen](#)).** Contact a healthcare provider if you have any questions about your test results or serial testing.

If Your Result Shows Invalid or Error

Sometimes the results are not clear or are inconclusive, and the test is unable to tell you if your results are positive or negative. Invalid results can occur for many reasons. Your specimen may not have been collected correctly or the test kit may have malfunctioned. Invalid test results are rare but can occur.

If the display on the self-test shows an invalid result or a test error, the test can not properly report your result. If this happens, refer to the instructions that came with the test, contact the manufacturer for assistance, and repeat testing will be necessary. You can also get testing from a healthcare provider or a public health [testing site](#).



Do you have:	Negative At-Home Self-Test	Positive At-Home Self-Test
Symptoms	<p>You probably do not have COVID-19. Isolate while symptomatic to reduce the spread of infections.</p> <p>If you or your doctor are still worried that you may have COVID-19 (for example, you had a recent close contact or your symptoms are very concerning), consider isolating and re-testing at home or through a healthcare facility in 2-3 days. If a second test is positive, isolate for at least 10 days since symptoms began.</p> <p>If your test is negative, you should follow your institution’s policies before returning to work/school. If you have been exposed to someone with COVID-19, follow guidance for quarantine.</p>	<p>Isolate for at least 10 days since symptoms began or, if no symptoms, then 10 days from the positive test.</p> <p>If no symptoms, consider contacting your healthcare provider for additional steps if: you don’t have a known exposure to someone with COVID-19, you have been vaccinated against COVID-19, or you have had COVID-19 within the past 90 days. If you do not have a provider, reach out to the COVID Resource Center at 628-217-6101.</p>
No symptoms, but a had a known exposure to someone with COVID-19	<p>If you don’t develop symptoms, continue to quarantine for 14 days from the date of exposure if you’re not fully vaccinated. In some situations, a shorter quarantine may be acceptable. Follow your work/school’s policies.</p> <p>Follow SFDPH guidance for quarantine.</p> <p>If you develop symptoms at any point, follow the instructions above to properly isolate and consider re-testing.</p>	<p>For more information, see: https://www.sfdph.org/dph/covid-19/isolation-and-quarantine.asp#confirmed</p>
No symptoms, no known exposure	<p>No need to isolate or quarantine. Continue to follow all other public health recommendations.</p> <p>Follow the test manufacturer’s instructions for serial (repeat) testing as indicated.</p>	

For more information on Isolation and Guidance, see: <https://www.sfdph.org/dph/covid-19/isolation-and-quarantine.asp#SummaryChart>



Resources

Center for Disease Control (CDC) Guidance

- [Guidance for COVID-19](#)
- [Self-Testing](#)
- [Vaccines for COVID-19](#)

California Department of Public Health (CDPH)

- [Find All Guidance](#)
- [Guidance for Fully Vaccinated People](#)
- [Guidance for Testing](#)
- [Guidance for Face Coverings](#)
- [CA Notify](#)

San Francisco Department of Public Health (SFDPH)

- [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [Get Tested](#)
- [Get Vaccinated](#)
- [Resources for Isolation and Quarantine](#)
- [Isolation and Quarantine Guidance](#)
- [TK-12 Schools and Youth Testing Guidance](#)