

Primary Care Covid-19 Antibody Testing; Calderdale & Kirklees

FAQs

Is the test mandatory?

No, this is not a mandatory test.

What is an antibody test?

An antibody test can tell someone whether they have had the virus that causes Covid-19 in the past, by analysing a blood sample. It differs from virus testing (PCR), which can tell someone whether they have the virus currently.

What do antibody test results mean?

A positive antibody test demonstrates that someone has developed antibodies to the virus. The presence of antibodies signals that the body has staged an immune response to the virus. Covid-19 is a new disease, and our understanding of the body's immune response to it is limited. We do not know, for example, how long an antibody response lasts, nor whether having antibodies means you can't transmit the virus to others. Our understanding of the virus will grow as new scientific evidence and studies emerge.

An antibody test result can only tell an individual whether or not they have had the virus in the past. Antibody tests are also being used currently in surveillance studies, to understand what proportion of the population have already had the virus.

Once I've had my blood test, am I able to stop the process or have the results removed from my health records?

Having the test is not mandatory. In the same way other diagnostic results are displayed in your records, you will not be able to have your results removed or stop the process once your bloods have been taken.

If you test positive for antibodies, can you ignore lockdown restrictions?

No. There is no evidence yet to suggest that those who have been proven to have had the virus are immune. This is the position of the World Health Organisation. You should continue to comply with social distancing measures and government guidelines. All infection prevention and control measures must continue to be in place irrespective of the presence of antibodies.

What is known about the nature and duration of an immune system response to the virus?

There is no strong evidence yet to suggest that those who have been proven to have had the virus are immune. This is the position of the WHO.

It is a fair assumption, based on what we know about other viruses, that those who get the virus will be immune or resistant, at least for a limited period of time. If you are usually healthy and your first illness was so severe you were prioritised for a virus (PCR) test and the result was positive, you will probably have developed some short-term immunity to the virus.

We do not know how long an antibody response lasts, nor whether having antibodies means one cannot transmit the virus. So it is an assumption that there is immunity, albeit a sensible one, and an assumption that if proven to have had the virus, you do not transmit.

How will the antibody tests fit with existing testing? Will people be tested for both if they have the antibody test?

Antibody and swab (PCR) tests fulfil different purposes, and it is unlikely someone would be given both tests at the same time. Antibody tests are used to detect antibodies to the virus as a marker of past infection.

The test works by taking a blood sample and testing that sample for the presence of antibodies.

A positive test result indicates that you have previously had the virus and have developed some form of immune response.

However, we do not yet know how long the antibody response lasts, so we don't know how long it might help your body resist the virus. And we don't know whether having antibodies means one cannot transmit the virus to others.

In contrast, a PCR test aims to find out if you currently have the virus. A positive result does not necessarily indicate that you will go on to develop antibodies to the virus and an immune response. It is possible that around 10% of people who test positive will not develop an immune response.

We will continue to offer testing to symptomatic staff and their household/family members with the PCR swab test. Someone with active symptoms of COVID-19 would not be offered the antibody test, and we would wait 14 days after symptoms to test for antibodies.

Can I have the test if I feel unwell or have symptoms?

Antibodies are not detected on testing for approximately 14 days post-exposure. Therefore, you must wait 14 days after feeling symptomatic, or having any mild illness before having the test taken. Please note that this includes if you have felt unwell but continued to be at work. Do not worry about missing an opportunity to have a test if you have been unwell, testing will continue into the future.

Will the result be either negative or positive?

There are three possible results: positive, negative and equivocal.

An equivocal result indicates a level of detectable antibodies on the cusp between positive and negative. It may be indicative of a recent infection. A repeat sample will be required at least two weeks after your original sample was taken to determine if your antibody levels have risen, fallen or remain the same. If the repeat blood sample returns with an equivocal result, you would not need a further blood test.

If my test result says I have antibodies, do I have immunity to Covid-19?

There is no evidence yet to suggest that those who have been proven to have had the virus are immune. This means you should continue to comply with social distancing measures and government guidelines. All

infection prevention and control measures, including full PPE compliance must continue to be in place irrespective of the presence of antibodies.

If you are antibody positive you may be eligible to donate convalescent plasma. Please visit this link for more information: <https://www.nhsbt.nhs.uk/covid-19-research/>

How long will it take to get my result?

We are anticipating results being back to your registered practice and in your patient record within 7 days of bloods being taken however this may vary due to demand and capacity of the testing lab.

Will my results be shared?

All results will be shared with Public Health England (PHE) who are collating the results of antibody testing for the purposes of establishing population prevalence. This data may be used to guide national policy on lockdown measures. We are obliged to share results pertaining to notifiable infectious diseases under the Public Health (Control of Disease) Act 1984 and the Health Protection (Notification) Regulations 2010. You may wish to share your result with your colleagues and employing organisation but there is no requirement to do so.

What is the point of antibody testing if you know so little about immunity?

Antibody testing has a critical role to play in helping us to learn about the level and length of immunity following infection and how the virus is spreading across the country. Public Health England (PHE) are currently undertaking a study, called the SIREN study, of 10,000 healthcare workers to establish if antibodies indicate any kind of immunity to Covid-19.

Are non-clinical staff eligible?

This test will be offered to all NHS staff regardless of their role, including volunteers.

Can anyone book one of these tests or have them done at their GP?

No. Antibody tests are currently prioritised for the NHS. A further rollout for partners will be developed as the next stage.

Are there any unknown implications of taking the test?

In consenting to the antibody test for COVID-19 this result will be recorded in my medical records and therefore may be disclosed in the information required by insurers and other applications including financial and the impact on this is currently unknown.

My registered Practice is not in Calderdale or Kirklees. How do I access the test?

This pathway is only open to staff who work in Calderdale or Kirklees and also have their registered Practice in Calderdale or Kirklees. Discussions are underway in agreeing the pathway for occasions whereby your registered Practice is in the adjoining authorities (Leeds, Bradford, and Wakefield) In the interim for North Kirklees only they can continue to use the manual process as launched by MYHT 2 weeks ago if their registered Practice is not within Kirklees.

Will GPs be indemnified for undertaking this work?

We can confirm it will be covered under the CNSGP scheme.

Are practices expected to register staff as patients?

We are not expecting staff to be registered as patients at a practice. Temporary registration is not admissible as part of the GP contract for the purposes of staff testing