

# COVID-19 antibody testing for staff

## Information pack (updated 27 May 2020)

As a member of staff at Guy's and St Thomas', you can now choose to have a blood test that will show whether or not you have previously had the COVID-19 infection.

The test will look for antibodies in your blood that have been produced by your body in response to SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19.

If you currently have COVID-19 symptoms, read our [symptomatic testing information here](#) instead.

### Why we are doing these tests

At the moment we do not know whether having antibodies against COVID-19 will protect you against the infection in the future, but we do know that in some other infections, the presence of antibodies can provide a degree of protection.

It is therefore possible that people who have COVID-19 antibodies may have some level of immunity, but it is not yet clear to what extent or for how long.

We are offering this test as we know that many of you will be interested to know whether or not you have had COVID-19 in the past. The test forms part of a national programme led by NHS England, and the results will provide more detailed knowledge about how widely the infection has spread across the country.

### Who can take part

We plan to open up this voluntary antibody testing to all staff, but we will be prioritising colleagues based on where they work and their level of vulnerability.

We're starting with colleagues from our emergency department, critical care, Essentia, community and oncology teams. If you work in another department, we appreciate your patience while you wait for testing to become available to you. We will update this document and send out wider communication when that time comes.

### How you can volunteer to be tested

We are working with the leadership teams in each of our priority staff groups to determine the best way of coordinating the tests for the colleagues who want them. Your manager will speak to you about this in due course.

The test is entirely voluntary – you do not have to take part if you don't want to.

### Appointment details

Many departments will have leads who will be coordinating the testing on behalf of their team. If you have confirmed that you would like to be tested, they will ask you for some basic details such as your name, date of birth and mobile phone number. Once your appointment has been booked you will be sent a text message with details of when and where to go for your test. Testing will take place within the Trust and you should receive your result by text message within two working days.

If you do take part in the testing process, your result will be added to your Electronic Patient Record (EPR) and will be provided confidentially to the Occupational Health team for reporting purposes.

## Frequently asked questions for staff COVID-19 antibody testing

Below are some answers to frequently asked questions about the testing. These explain more about the tests, how you will receive your results, and what each result means.

### 1. What is an antibody?

Antibodies are proteins that are produced by the body in response to infections, including viruses such as SARS-CoV-2 (the cause of COVID-19). Antibodies can be produced in response to the virus itself (i.e. when the virus enters your body) or in response to vaccination.

### 2. What is the COVID-19 antibody test?

The COVID-19 antibody test is a blood test which detects specific antibodies called SARS-CoV-2 IgG. A sample of blood is taken from a vein from your inner elbow as with other basic blood tests.

### 3. Can anyone have an antibody test?

We are planning to test as many staff as possible, but there will be a priority list which takes into account factors such as area of work and the vulnerability of the individual member of staff.

### 4. What is the reason for having an antibody test?

The antibody test for COVID-19 is extremely accurate and will determine whether or not you have previously been infected with COVID-19.

When antibodies are detected it almost certainly means you have been infected with the virus. However there is not currently enough evidence to confirm whether having antibodies against COVID-19 will protect you against the infection in the future.

In some other infections, the presence of antibodies can provide a degree of protection. Therefore there is a possibility that people who have COVID-19 antibodies may have some level of immunity, but it is not clear to what extent and for how long.

**It is therefore crucial that you strictly follow the Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) rules regarding hand hygiene and the correct use of appropriate PPE at work, and maintain social distancing wherever possible, regardless of your antibody results.**

### 5. How will I receive my test results?

The results of the tests will be sent to you by text message within two working days of your test, so it is vital that you provide your correct mobile number beforehand.

If you have further questions you can contact the Occupational Health team by email at [OHAdministrator@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:OHAdministrator@gstt.nhs.uk).

### 6. I haven't received my result – what should I do?

If you have not received a text message with your test results three working days after your test, please contact the Occupational Health team at [OHAdministrator@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:OHAdministrator@gstt.nhs.uk)

**7. I have received my COVID-19 antibody results and it says antibodies are DETECTED. What does this mean?**

It means that antibodies against the virus are present in your blood. It confirms that you have been infected with COVID-19 at some point in the past.

**8. I have received my COVID-19 antibody results and it says antibodies are DETECTED. Does it mean I am immune?**

We do not know whether having antibodies against COVID-19 will protect you against the infection in the future.

We do know that in some other infections, the presence of antibodies can provide a degree of protection. Therefore people who have COVID-19 antibodies may have some level of immunity but it is not clear to what extent or for how long. **It is therefore crucial that you strictly follow the Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) rules regarding hand hygiene and the correct use of appropriate PPE at work, regardless of your antibody results.**

If you become unwell again with COVID-19 symptoms, you should self-isolate and contact the testing team by email at [Covid19testing@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:Covid19testing@gstt.nhs.uk) to request a test appointment at the Trust. Alternatively you can arrange to be tested nearer to where you live by visiting [www.gov.uk/apply-coronavirus-test-essential-workers](http://www.gov.uk/apply-coronavirus-test-essential-workers)

**9. I have received my COVID-19 antibody results and it says antibodies are DETECTED but I have not had fever or persistent cough since January. Is the test accurate?**

The COVID-19 antibody test is extremely accurate. When antibodies are detected it almost certainly means you have had the infection. However, a large proportion of people only have minor symptoms so you might not have noticed them at the time. Some people will have had no symptoms at all.

**10. I have received my COVID-19 antibody results and it says antibodies are DETECTED. Do I need to self-isolate?**

No, you do not need to self-isolate. Having the antibodies does not mean you have a current infection, or the ability to infect other people.

However, regardless of your antibody results, you will need to self-isolate if:

- You are currently symptomatic
- You develop symptoms in the future
- You have had a nose and throat swab during the past seven days and the swab was reported positive.

For further advice please see [www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/staff-guidance](http://www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/staff-guidance)

**11. I have received my COVID-19 antibody results and it says antibodies are NOT DETECTED. What does this mean?**

In general, it means that you have not been infected with COVID-19.

However, it can take up to three weeks for the body to develop antibodies so there is a chance that you might have been infected with COVID-19 very recently and your body is in the process of developing the antibodies.

**12. I have received my COVID-19 antibody results and it says antibodies are NOT DETECTED. Does this mean that I am not immune and therefore should stay at home?**

There is not currently enough evidence to confirm whether having antibodies against COVID-19 will protect you against the infection. Therefore, there is still a risk of infection with COVID-19.

You do not need to stay at home but **it is vital that you strictly follow the Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) rules regarding hand hygiene and the correct use of appropriate PPE at work, and maintain social distancing wherever possible, regardless of your antibody results.**

**13. Who has access to my results?**

We do not communicate your result with anyone directly except Occupational Health. However your COVID-19 antibody result will be available on your Electronic Patient Result (EPR). The antibody test is completely voluntary and, by having the blood test, you are providing consent to have your blood taken and tested, and for your COVID-19 antibody result to be uploaded to EPR.

Remember, patient confidentiality rules apply to staff as well as patient records, so as a general rule, staff are strictly prohibited to access colleagues' results on EPR.

An audit trail identifies who has accessed individual records, so if you have concerns around who may have accessed your antibody result, please contact Occupational Health to request an investigation.