BOSTON PUBLIC HEALTH COMMISSION | GUIDANCE

When to use COVID-19 rapid antigen tests

It is important for those who work with the public to understand how to protect their health and that of the people they serve. Along with vaccination, masking, and physical distancing, COVID-19 testing for early detection and self-isolation is a critical way to reduce the chances of COVID-19 transmission and protect people's health. In addition to multiple testing sites you can visit throughout the city, there are some tests that you can perform yourself; they're often called "self-tests," "at-home tests," or "over-the-counter tests." Self-tests are easy to use and provide rapid results. This document provides guidance on when to use COVID-19 self-test rapid antigen kits.

You can use a rapid antigen self-test when you:

1. **Have COVID-19 symptoms.** If you have COVID-19 symptoms, it is important to know whether you have COVID-19 to self-isolate to limit transmission.
2. **Were exposed to COVID-19 by close contact.** Close contacts are defined as someone who was within 6 feet of you, for at least 10-15 minutes, while the infected person had symptoms or within the 48 hours before their symptoms started.
3. **Plan to gather with a lot of people or be in a crowded place.** Using a self-test before gathering indoors with others can give you information about your risk of spreading COVID-19 to others, especially unvaccinated children, older individuals, those who are immunocompromised, or those at higher risk of severe disease.
4. **Tested positive for COVID-19 and are seeking to end home isolation and return to work or school.** Per the BPHC guidance, if you are fully vaccinated, you may end isolation after 5 days if you have not had a fever for 24 hours (without taking fever-reducing medications), you have experienced improvement in other symptoms, and you have produced a negative rapid antigen test on or after day 5 . If you are unvaccinated, you may end isolation after 7 days after first positive viral test, if you don't have symptoms and you produce a negative rapid antigen test, as above. Use of a self-test can help confirm that you can end isolation once you are symptom-free. If you don't have symptoms, you should continue wearing a well-fitted mask until 10 days after the first positive test date.

How to Use a COVID-19 Self-Test
To use a self-test, it is important that you follow the manufacturer's instructions. We recommend reading the instructions from start to finish before you begin the test process. The testing process and instructions can be slightly different between brands of tests. After testing, the test materials and packaging can be disposed of in the regular trash.

Interpreting COVID-19 Self-Test Results
- Positive test result: If your self-test shows a positive result, it means you likely have a current COVID-19 infection. You should isolate, inform your close contacts and inform your healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns. You do not need to obtain a PCR test to confirm the results.
- Negative test result: If your self-test produces a negative result, it indicates that you may not be infected or may be at lower risk of spreading COVID-19 to others. However, **it does not rule out infection** because it's possible that the test was conducted too early for the virus to be found. If you have symptoms of COVID-19, we recommend repeating the test 48 hours later to increase the confidence that the negative result is accurate and you do not have COVID-19. If you were exposed to someone with COVID-19, we recommend testing after day 5 of your last exposure.

Sources:

1. Self-Testing | CDC
2. How To Use a Self-Test | CDC (YouTube)

3. [How To Interpret Self-Test Results | CDC (YouTube)](#)
4. [BPHC Isolation Guidance - 1/14/2022](#)