PATIENT
EDUCATION
HANDOUT

The Differences Between COVID-19 Tests

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As COVID-19 has been around longer, testing has rapidly grown into two main types: viral testing and antibody testing. It is important to know the differences in these tests and what the results mean.

VIRAL TESTING
If you are showing signs of COVID-19, you typically get tested by your primary care provider. This test is performed by inserting a swab through the nose to get a sample of your nasal secretions. This is considered a "viral test" because it detects if the COVID-19 virus is currently present. If it is positive, then you currently have an active COVID-19 infection. There is a rapid test that gives results in about an hour and one that is sent to a lab that returns results in 1–2 days. If you think you are showing symptoms of COVID-19, contact your health care provider, who will determine if you qualify for testing.

ANTIBODY TESTING
Antibodies are a part of the immune system that fight off infection. When a person is infected with a virus or bacteria, antibodies are made that fight that specific infection. COVID-19 antibody testing is a blood test that checks for COVID-19 antibodies and will confirm if you have ever had COVID-19. It is not used if you currently have COVID-19 symptoms. This test may be used to monitor those individuals who have had a positive viral test. Research is still ongoing to prove that those with COVID-19 antibodies are immune to the virus. Ask your health care provider if there is antibody testing available for you.

SOURCE(S): *The Center for Disease Control and Prevention*