

# PCR vs Rapid Antigen Test

What they are, differences and when to use one versus the other

	PCR TEST	RAPID ANTIGEN TEST (AT-HOME)
<b>WHAT IS IT</b>	Nasal or throat swab lab-processed test (includes all testing performed at UHS/RSF)	Nasal swab over-the-counter or at-home COVID-19 tests
<b>WHAT IT TESTS FOR</b>	Viral genetic material Best for early diagnosis of infection	Viral protein Best for early release from isolation (if eligible)
<b>WHEN YOU SHOULD GET THIS TEST</b>	Symptoms concerning for COVID-19 (isolate while you await results) 3-5 days after close contact with someone with COVID-19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- If you have COVID, getting better/have no symptoms, &amp; want to return to regular activities sooner than 10 days (but no earlier than 6 days)</li> <li>- If you have new symptoms, &amp; already had COVID within last 90 days</li> <li>- If you have symptoms, &amp; cannot get access to timely PCR testing: best to take the day AFTER symptoms develop, or do 2 tests 24 hours apart if the first one is negative</li> </ul>
<b>WHEN NOT TO USE THIS TEST</b>	Do not repeat PCR tests if you already had COVID-19 within the past 90 days (may be intermittently positive, even if you are no longer infectious/ill)	You CAN use if you don't have symptoms, e.g. pre-gathering or 3-5 days post-contact, but high risk of false negative (not super reassuring)
<b>HOW LONG RESULTS TAKE</b>	Most take 24-48 hours (UHS has limited numbers of rapid PCR tests resulting within 2-4 hours, currently prioritized for symptomatic dorm residents)	15-30 minutes
<b>ACCURACY OF RESULTS</b>	Highly sensitive, highly specific. In other words: both positive and negative results are highly reliable if timing/use is right	Less sensitive If it's positive, you can likely rely on the result (especially when there is a lot of COVID around)  If it is negative, & you have high suspicion/concern, you should retake an antigen test in 24 hours or take a PCR test & stay home in the meantime