

# Viral Testing vs Antibody Testing



Two kinds of tests are available for COVID-19: **viral tests** and **antibody tests**.

- A viral test tells you if you have a current infection.
- An antibody test may tell you if you had a previous infection

An antibody test, also known as “serology tests,” may not be able to show if you have a current infection, because it can take 1-3 weeks to make antibodies after symptoms occur.

We are thankful that local healthcare providers are working to help Butte County during the COVID-19 crisis. Antibody testing has recently been made available in some locations in Butte County. Antibody testing can be a useful tool for public health and our community to help us understand how many people have been infected. However, this type of testing may give persons tested a false sense of security.

## **Antibody Testing Limitations:**

- Antibody tests do not determine if a person currently has COVID-19
- Antibody tests do not determine if a person is currently contagious
- At this time, a positive antibody test is unable to determine if the person is protected against a second infection
- A positive antibody does not change any recommendation for the use of personal protection equipment
- A positive antibody does not change the requirement to follow the Governor’s “Stay at Home” order

The current antibody testing situation is changing quickly. Because of this and the above limitations, antibody testing should not be used for diagnosis or determination of immunity.

## **If you choose to get an antibody test, what does your test result mean?**

### **Negative Test Result** (no antibodies detected)

- A negative result is not always an indication that a person has not been infected
- Sometimes a negative result means a person WAS infected, but the body’s immune systems response was not strong enough to make antibodies.
- Sometimes a negative response means a person may be infected, but the body has not had enough time for antibodies to develop (which can take 1–3 weeks after someone is infected to develop in the body).

### **Positive Test Result** (antibodies detected)

- A positive result may mean that the body was infected at some point in the past
- A positive result may be inaccurate, in other words, a false positive

**Learn More About COVID-19 in Butte County:**

<http://www.buttecounty.net/publichealth>