

Talking Points/FAQ

COVID-19 Antibody Testing



**American
Red Cross**

June 4, 2020

For Internal Use Only

Talking Points

On June 15, the American Red Cross will begin testing all blood, platelet and plasma donations for COVID-19 antibodies.

- The antibody test is authorized by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and may indicate if the donor's immune system has produced antibodies to the coronavirus, regardless of whether they developed symptoms.
- The Red Cross hopes testing for COVID-19 antibodies will provide our valued donors insight into whether they may have been exposed to this coronavirus.
- We recognize that individuals and public health organizations desire more information about COVID-19, and as an organization dedicated to helping others, the Red Cross is fortunate to be able to help during this pandemic.

To protect the health and safety of our staff and donors, it is important that individuals who do not feel well postpone donation.

- The Red Cross is not testing donors to diagnose illness, referred to as a diagnostic test, and a positive antibody test results do not confirm infection or immunity.
- Individuals who believe they may be ill with COVID-19 should not present to donate until they are symptom free for 28 days.
- Blood, platelet and plasma donations will be tested using samples obtained at the time of donation and sent to a testing laboratory where the samples will also undergo routine screening and infectious disease testing.

If you are feeling well, please schedule an appointment to donate by using the Red Cross Blood Donor App, visiting [RedCrossBlood.org](https://www.redcrossblood.org) or calling 1-800-RED CROSS. Antibody test results will be available within 7 to 10 days.

- All Red Cross donors need to schedule an appointment prior to arrival, and will be required to wear a face mask or covering while at the blood drive or donation center. Donors are encouraged to bring their own face mask or covering.
- Red Cross donors can expect to receive the results of their antibody test through our Red Cross Blood Donor App or on our donor portal at RedCrossBlood.org.
- This is the time to take care of one another, and blood donation is essential to ensuring the health of those in our community.
- There is no known end date in this fight against coronavirus, and we need the help of donors and blood drive hosts to ensure blood products are readily available for patients.
- Each Red Cross blood drive and donation center follows the highest standards of safety and infection control.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is the COVID-19 antibody test?

A: An antibody test screens for antibodies in your blood. Antibodies are formed when fighting infection, like COVID-19. An antibody test assesses whether your immune system has responded to the infection, not if the virus is currently present.

Specifically, the COVID-19 antibody test used by the Red Cross is authorized by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and may indicate if the donor's immune system has produced antibodies to the coronavirus, regardless of whether they developed symptoms.

Q: Are the quantity of antibodies an individual has related to how sick they were?

A: There are no definite data to suggest that the quantity or concentration of antibodies an individual has relates to how sick they were.

Q: How long are COVID-19 antibodies present after recovery from the virus?

A: Currently, medical experts do not know how long COVID-19 antibodies are detectable in blood after recovering from COVID-19 illness. However, based on previous data during other coronavirus outbreaks, such as SARS, antibodies remain detectable in blood for many months, but levels start to slowly decline approximately four months after resolution of infection.

Q: Why is the Red Cross testing blood, platelet and plasma donations for COVID-19 antibodies?

A: The Red Cross hopes testing for COVID-19 antibodies will provide our valued donors insight – into whether they may have been exposed to this coronavirus. We recognize that individuals and public health organizations desire more information about COVID-19, and as an organization dedicated to helping others, the Red Cross is fortunate to be able to step up to help during this pandemic.

Q: Do donors need to make an appointment to donate blood and receive the test?

A: Yes. Donors can use the Red Cross Blood Donor App, visit [RedCrossBlood.org](https://www.RedCrossBlood.org) or call 1-800- RED CROSS to make an appointment at a nearby blood drive or donation center.

Q: Will antibody testing change the donation process for presenting donors?

A: No. The Red Cross blood donation process at our blood drives and donation centers will not change. Blood, platelet and plasma donations will be tested using samples obtained at the time of donation and sent to a testing laboratory where the samples will also undergo routine screening and infectious disease testing.

Q: Will there be a donor charge for this test?

A: No. The Red Cross is providing free antibody testing for a limited period of time.

Q: How is the Red Cross able to fund antibody testing if it is not charging donors?

A: The Red Cross is rallying the support of generous financial donors to target funding toward this effort which we hope will fuel this program. Our ability to continue antibody testing will be largely dependent on available funding and the evolving needs of this pandemic.

Q: How long will the Red Cross be antibody testing?

A: The Red Cross will be providing antibody testing for a limited period of time. We expect to offer this test throughout the summer months, and will evaluate over the coming months if we are able to continue testing dependent on available funding and the evolving needs of the pandemic.

Q: Will every donation be tested every time?

A: We will test all donations, each time while the Red Cross is doing antibody testing. The one exception are autologous donations which are donations given for an individual's own use, typically prior to a scheduled surgical procedure.

Q: When will donors be notified of their test results? And how can donors access test results?

A: Red Cross donors can expect to receive the results of their antibody test within 7 to 10 days through our Red Cross Blood Donor App or on our donor portal at RedCrossBlood.org.

Q: What type of antibody test is the Red Cross using?

A: The Red Cross is using the FDA-authorized Ortho Clinical Diagnostics VITROS® Anti-SARS-CoV2 Total Test.

Q: Is the antibody test specific to COVID-19 or will other coronavirus antibodies show up as positives?

A: The Red Cross is using the FDA-authorized Ortho Clinical Diagnostics VITROS® Anti-SARS-CoV2 Total Test, which is specific to COVID-19.

Q: How accurate is the antibody test that the Red Cross is using?

A: The Red Cross is using the FDA-authorized Ortho Clinical Diagnostics VITROS® Anti-SARS-CoV2 Total Test. The test has been shown to have acceptable performance criteria allowing the test to receive FDA authorization. Further testing will demonstrate the test's accuracy.

Q: If antibody testing isn't accurate, why bother?

A: We recognize the potential limitations of antibody testing at this time in the pandemic. The antibody test used by the Red Cross, and authorized for use by the FDA, has shown to have acceptable performance.

The Red Cross hopes testing for COVID-19 antibodies will provide our valued donors insight into whether they may have been exposed to this coronavirus. We recognize that individuals and public health organizations desire more information about COVID-19, and as an organization dedicated to helping others, the Red Cross is fortunate to be able to step up to help during this pandemic.

Q: Is the Red Cross providing a diagnostic test? Will it tell donors if they currently have the virus?

A: No. *The Red Cross is not testing donors to diagnose illness*, referred to as a diagnostic test, and positive antibody test results do not confirm infection or immunity; a positive antibody test indicates potential exposure to the virus. Individuals who believe they may be ill with COVID-19 should not present to donate until they are symptom free for 28 days.

Q: What's the difference between a diagnostic test and an antibody test?

A: A diagnostic test detects current infection. An antibody test screens for antibodies in your blood. Antibodies are formed when fighting infection, like COVID-19. An antibody test assesses whether your immune systems has responded to the infection, not if the virus or infection is currently active.

Q: What does it mean to have a positive COVID-19 antibody testing result?

A: A positive result indicates that an individual may have had previous exposure to the virus that causes COVID-19 and their body has developed specific antibodies to the virus. At this time, it

is unknown if the antibodies that result from a COVID-19 infection will provide someone with immunity from a future coronavirus infection.

Q: What does it mean to have a negative COVID-19 antibody testing result?

A: A negative result most likely means that the individual has not been exposed to COVID-19 and therefore has not developed antibodies to the virus. It also could mean that antibodies are present but at levels below the test's threshold for detection, or that the test did not recognize those antibodies that a donor made.

Q: Will the Red Cross be providing COVID-19 antibody test results to anyone besides the donor?

A: The Red Cross will coordinate with state health departments or federal agencies to provide requested COVID-19 antibody test results as all work to learn more about this virus, its prevalence in our communities and how we can prevent its spread. As standard practice, the Red Cross does not reveal the identity of an individual in relation to their test result unless required by law and data are most often supplied in aggregate.

Q: What if a donor does not want to have their donation tested for COVID-19 antibodies?

A: All donations will be tested for COVID-19 antibodies. Individual donors will not have the ability to opt-out of this testing.

Q: By donating blood, will a donor lose the antibodies needed to protect themselves from getting sick again?

A: No. While blood donation can cause your antibody levels to drop very slightly after donation, they do not affect an individual's ability to fight off future infection.

Q: Will donations that test positive for COVID-19 antibodies be used for convalescent plasma treatments?

A: Not at this time. Additional testing would need to occur to verify the blood product would help a patient battling COVID-19 as there are instances of false positives, or a test result that incorrectly states the presence of antibodies. We are currently evaluating the possibility to do this in the future.

Q: If a donor learns that they have COVID-19 antibodies, can they give convalescent plasma?

A: Possibly – Individuals may qualify to donate convalescent plasma if they meet the following criteria:

- Are at least 17 years old and weigh 110 lbs. Additional weight requirements apply for donors age 18 or younger.
- Are in good health. You generally feel well, even if you're being treated for a chronic condition. [View blood donation eligibility FAQs.](#)
- Have a prior, verified diagnosis of COVID-19, but are now are symptom free and fully recovered from COVID-19.

Individuals who meet these criteria are encouraged to please complete the Donor Request Form on [RedCrossBlood.org/plasma4covid](https://www.RedCrossBlood.org/plasma4covid).

Q: What if someone is not eligible to give blood? Can they still receive an antibody test?

A: An individual will need to meet FDA eligibility guidelines to give blood, platelets or plasma to have their donation tested for COVID-19 antibodies.

Q: Do donors need to have a successful donation to receive an antibody test result?

A: Yes. Donors will need to have a successful donation to receive COVID-19 antibody results. Per standard donation procedure, only successful donations are sent to our laboratory for testing.

Q: What if someone gave before June 15? Can that donation also be tested?

A: No. Donations prior to June 15, with the exception of convalescent plasma donations, will not be tested for antibodies. Eligible individuals can give blood donations every 56 days. We encourage individuals to sign up for when they will next be eligible to receive a COVID-19 antibody test.

Q: Is the Red Cross testing just at centers or is this available at mobile blood drives?

A: All blood, platelet and plasma donations will be tested for COVID-19 antibodies which includes those who give at mobile blood drives as well as donation centers.

Q: Will antibody testing endanger the health and safety of our staff and donors as sick people seek COVID-19 tests?

A: To protect the health and safety of our staff and donors, the Red Cross asks that those who are not feeling well and healthy postpone donation. In our communications with donors we are emphasizing that the Red Cross is not testing donors to diagnose illness, referred to as a diagnostic test, and positive antibody test results do not confirm infection or immunity to COVID-19. Individuals who believe they may be ill with COVID-19 should not present to donate until they are symptom free for 28 days and feeling well and healthy.