

Clinical Laboratory Communication

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SARS-CoV-2 IgG Antibody Testing Frequently Asked Questions

Q Does UnityPoint Health Des Moines Laboratory currently offer a test to detect COVID-19 antibodies?

A The current test can be used to detect IgG antibodies against SARS-CoV-2, the causative agent of COVID-19. This test is most useful for its negative predictive value in patients whom symptoms began at least 14 days ago. Symptomatic patients should be tested using PCR testing, not serology testing.

Q What is antibody testing?

A Antibody testing, also known as serologic testing, is used to detect antibodies in a patient's blood specimen (serum/plasma). Antibodies are produced by the immune system in response to an infection. The presence of antibodies indicates that an individual has been exposed to (infected with) that particular infectious agent. Serologic tests detect antibodies against infectious agents in serum and are a marker of an immune response to infection.

Q Will this test detect antibodies in everyone who has had COVID-19?

A IgG antibodies to SARS-CoV-2 develop approximately 8 to 11 days post-symptom onset (seroconversion) for the majority of patients. Some individuals may develop antibodies after this time frame, while others, particularly those who are immunosuppressed, may never develop a detectable immune response.

Q When should I use this test?

A This testing is only advised to be performed on individuals at least 10 days after initial symptom onset.

Q Is UnityPoint Health offering a test to detect IgM antibodies against the virus?

A Although IgM antibodies against the virus may be detected sooner than IgG antibodies, there currently is not an assay on a instrument platform that UPHDM has. As testing methods are released we will evaluate providing an IgM assay. A separate message will be sent out if/when an IgM antibody test is offered.

Q What does detection of IgG antibodies against SARS-CoV-2 mean for a patient?

A Detection may indicate prior exposure (infection) to the virus (SARS-CoV-2) however; positive results may be due to past or present infection with non-SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus strains, such as coronavirus HKU1, NL63, OC43, or 229E. At this point, we cannot be confident that detected antibodies indicate immunity to reinfection. For some viruses antibodies are completely protective. For others (e.g. influenza) protection is often times incomplete. And still for others antibodies are not protective.

Q Should this test be used to diagnose patients suspected of currently having COVID-19?

A Symptomatic patients should be tested using PCR testing, not serology testing. UnityPoint Health Des Moines Laboratory is offering serology testing only as a means to detect IgG antibodies to the virus, not to diagnose recent or active infection. This test may be useful for its negative predictive value in patients whom symptoms began at least 14 days ago.

For the most up to date information on laboratory testing, go to the laboratory testing guide

<http://www.pathologylab.org/clinical-testing.aspx>



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