



Frequently Asked Questions About Rhode Island's Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Serosurvey

July 15, 2020

To register for the survey or to learn more, please visit [FirstSeroSurveyRI.com](https://www.firstserosurveyri.com).

Text **TestRI** to **78378** to get the registration link sent to your smart phone.

The Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH) is conducting a large-scale serologic survey, or serosurvey, in collaboration with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the US Department of Health and Human Services. This serosurvey will be administered to people who volunteer to participate and who work as first responders (Fire, EMS, police), Rhode Island National Guard (RING) members, RIDOH employees, correctional facility workers, and hospital and nursing home staff. This survey is designed to learn more about SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, and its impact on our communities.

About the Serosurvey

What is a serosurvey?

- A **serosurvey** is one way to learn how a disease affects a community. The serosurvey involves testing participants' blood for antibodies, special proteins produced in response to an infection. By giving a sample of blood and answering some questions, you can help us better understand COVID-19, including how the body responds to the virus, how often the virus causes an infection with symptoms, frequency of specific symptoms, and risk factors for disease. It can also help us estimate how many people may have already been infected with the virus. Additionally, the information we learn could help in the development of treatments and vaccines and other prevention tools.
- **These tests are important for public health; however, they are sometimes difficult to interpret for personal health. A positive or negative antibody test should not change your efforts to prevent COVID-19, nor should test results be used to decide whether or not you go to work.**

Why am I being asked to take a serosurvey test?

- People who work as first responders (Fire, EMS, police), RING members, RIDOH employees, correctional facility workers, and hospital and nursing home staff are more likely to have been in contact with people who have had COVID-19. Testing people who have been on the front lines will give us important information about disease prevention and transmission.

Do I need to participate in the serosurvey?

- Your participation is completely voluntary.

What happens if I choose not to participate?

- If you choose not to participate, your employer cannot take any negative action against you. Your employer will not be given a list of participants. You can decide if you wish to share your test results with your employer or others.

Who is eligible to participate?

- This volunteer opportunity is being offered to first responders (Fire, EMS, police), RING members, RIDOH employees, correctional facility workers, and hospital and nursing home staff. If you received the email invitation, you are potentially eligible to participate.
- The first step of the process is to answer some basic screening questions. You will not be eligible to participate if you have been sick or tested positive for COVID-19 using a swab or saliva test in the last two weeks (based on the date you were tested by your provider), or if you do not have a mobile phone number or email address with which to access the survey and test results.

Why can't people participate if they have been recently sick or tested positive for COVID-19?

- People who have been sick or tested positive for COVID-19 with a swab or saliva test in the last two weeks cannot be tested accurately for antibodies. Antibodies take time to develop after an infection, so antibody testing will not be accurate for someone who is sick or was recently sick.
- If you are sick, you should not go to work and should remain at home as much as possible. You should only leave home for essential medical care, which may include getting a swab or saliva test for COVID-19. Visit RIDOH's COVID-19 [webpage](#) for more information about what to do when you are sick, when to get medical care, and when you can leave home.

If I previously tested positive for COVID-19, am I still eligible to participate?

- If you were tested at least two weeks ago, you are eligible to participate in this testing. We want people who were confirmed to have COVID-19 using a swab or saliva test to participate so we can learn more about how the body responds to the virus, such as how long after infection antibodies can be detected.

What can I expect when participating in this survey?

- First, you will be asked to complete online screening questions. Participants who meet the screening criteria will then be asked to complete an online form to give your permission to be included in the serosurvey. The survey includes questions on basic demographic information, your role in the workplace, whether you have certain medical conditions, symptoms you may have experienced, and other information to help us better understand the virus.
- Upon completion of the questionnaire, you will be directed to a test site in or nearby your workplace. You will then receive your result through a secure link through your email in approximately three to four days. The link will take you to the MyQuest portal where you can view your test results.
- To participate in the study and see you if you qualify, please visit [FirstSeroSurveyRI.com](https://www.firstserosurveyri.com).

Can I reschedule if I am unavailable during the assigned date and time?

- There will be several opportunities for serosurvey participation; however, testing appointments may not be available at preferred testing locations.

Is testing free? Will my health insurance be billed?

- Yes, the test is free and your insurance will not be billed.

Logistics and Human Resource Questions

Where are the testing sites?

- Most testing sites will be located on-site or near first responder/public safety agencies, hospitals, nursing homes, and correctional facilities. Additional testing sites may be offered depending on the level of interest.

How long will it take to get tested?

- The process should take no more than 10 to 15 minutes.

Should I wear personal protective equipment (PPE) when I go to get tested?

- You should wear a face covering while getting tested; no other PPE is needed.

About the Antibody Blood Test

What will my blood be tested for?

- Serology testing checks for the presence of antibodies. The test that will be performed on your blood sample is designed to detect antibodies to SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19.
- The test used in this survey **does not** diagnose a person who is currently infected with COVID-19, nor does a positive test mean that you are protected from SARS-CoV-2.

What are antibodies?

- Antibodies are special proteins that the body produces to help fight off infections. They are made in response to an infection. They can be produced even if a person has few or no symptoms. It generally takes some time after infection for antibodies to be produced and become detectable in blood. Antibodies are generally detectable after a person has recovered from the infection.
- Sometimes antibodies protect us from getting the same infection again; however, **we do not know whether this is true for COVID-19**. We also do not yet know how quickly antibodies are produced when someone has COVID-19 or about likely differences in the amount and type of

antibodies people produce in response to infection. Antibodies are only part of the complex immune system in our bodies that works to fight off infections.

What is the difference between antibody tests and the tests used to diagnose COVID-19?

- The serosurvey test is a blood test. It tests for antibodies to see if you had COVID-19. It cannot be used to check for a current infection of COVID-19 (i.e., whether you are currently ill from COVID-19).
- The diagnostic test to determine if you are currently infected with COVID-19 is different from a serosurvey test. It is performed by inserting a swab (similar to a long cotton swab) into your nose or throat.

Is the blood test safe?

- The test sample is obtained by drawing blood from a vein. The risk of complications is extremely low and is the same as when you have blood drawn at your medical provider's office.
- Your blood will be drawn by trained staff wearing appropriate PPE. Recommendations for physical distancing and surface disinfection will be followed to avoid exposure of individuals to COVID-19 during procedures.

Where will my blood be sent for testing?

- Blood samples will be sent to Quest Diagnostics, the laboratory partner that we have contracted with for this initiative. After initial testing, the remaining blood specimen will be sent to CDC. CDC will receive de-identified blood specimens, meaning your personal information will not be directly linked with your sample and the CDC will not be able to identify you.

Why is my blood sample being sent to the CDC after testing?

- The part of your blood sample that is left over after testing for antibodies will be stored at the CDC. Keeping your sample is necessary in case the results of this first test need to be verified or new tests become available. One reason we may need to retest is if a person's blood sample is positive for antibodies, but then they develop COVID-19 infection after their sample is taken. In such a case, CDC needs to confirm that the blood sample was truly positive for antibodies.
- The CDC will not have your personal information and will not contact you directly with any future results. RIDOH will link your sample number with your personal information and contact you with results relevant to your health, if necessary.

What if I don't want my blood sample stored?

- Consenting to store your blood sample for possible retesting is required to participate in the survey. Keeping your blood to retest for antibodies is an important part of making sure testing quality is high.
- You will also be asked if your sample can be used for future studies related to COVID-19. Consenting to use your blood sample for these other types of future studies is **not** required for participation.

How will I get my test result back?

- Results will be available to you within three to four days. Your test results will be provided through our contracted laboratory partner, Quest Diagnostics. You will be sent an email to the address you provided, alerting you to the availability of your test results. You will be directed to a secure patient web portal known as MyQuest where you can [log in to see your results](#).
- **Note:** Prior to logging in to the MyQuest portal to get your test results, please be sure to complete all required registration steps. Completing registration will ensure your test results will be available in a timely manner.

Meaning of Test Results

What does a positive test result mean?

- A **positive** test result means that antibodies were detected in your blood sample. This most likely means that you were infected with the virus that causes COVID-19 at some point in the past. However, it is also possible you did not have COVID-19 and the antibodies detected were from an infection with a related virus. This is sometimes called a **false positive**.
- **A positive test result does not mean you are immune to COVID-19 or that you can't get it again.** Sometimes the antibodies developed in response to an infection protect us from getting that same infection again. We do not yet know whether this is true for COVID-19.
- Continue all measures recommended by RIDOH to prevent spreading the virus. Continue to wear appropriate protection at your workplace, clean your hands often, wear face coverings, and maintain six feet of physical distance when possible. Do not change these efforts based on your test result.

What does a negative test result mean?

- A **negative** test result means that antibodies were not detected in your blood sample. This can have several possible meanings. Most likely it means that you have **not** been infected with COVID-19.
- A negative test result could also mean that you were infected with COVID-19, but that:
 - There has not been enough time for antibodies to develop; **or**
 - Your body did not produce enough antibodies for the test to be able to detect them.

If I test positive for COVID-19, is it safe for me to be around my family and others?

- A positive COVID-19 test means that you likely had COVID-19 at some point in the past. Given the amount of time that has passed, you are likely no longer contagious from that infection. However, we still don't know whether you can get COVID-19 again. You should thus continue to practice physical distancing and clean your hands often to protect yourself and others.

If I test positive, does that mean my family was exposed to the virus and may have been infected?

- Family and other household members are at increased risk of COVID-19 given the nature of shared living space; however, this does not mean your family had the virus.

Can my family get tested?

- We are not able to test family members at this time. Your family members should speak with their medical provider if they have questions about getting tested.

Who should I call if I have questions about my test results?

- If you have general questions about the serosurvey program or would like more information about obtaining test results, call the Quest Diagnostics helpline at **833-670-0253**.
- If you have questions about your personal medical history or test result, you should speak with your medical provider.

Will my test results affect whether I can go to work?

- No, your test results will not affect whether you can go to work. A positive or negative antibody test should not be used to make any decisions about going to work.
- Recommendations for returning to work in Rhode Island can be found at RIDOH's COVID-19 Information [webpage](#).

What should I do after I get my test result?

- It is important to remember that we do not yet know whether having antibodies to COVID-19 will prevent you from getting the infection again. As such, whether your test result was positive or negative, it is still critical to keep taking measures to avoid getting infected and spreading infection.
- Continue to follow steps for prevention at home and at work such as cleaning your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use hand sanitizer that has at least 60% alcohol.
- Use recommended PPE at work and continue to follow recommended cleaning and disinfection practices.
- Continue to follow physical distancing at work and when not at work, including staying home as much as possible and staying at least six feet from others when outside your home. You must also continue to use a face covering when outside your home if physical distance cannot be maintained.
- Continue to monitor your health and be alert for [COVID-19 symptoms](#).
 - Be aware of the symptoms of COVID-19. People with COVID-19 have had a wide range of symptoms reported— ranging from mild symptoms to severe illness. Symptoms may appear **two to 14 days after exposure to the virus**. People with these symptoms may have COVID-19: cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fever or chills, muscle or body aches, recent loss of taste or smell, sore throat, nausea or vomiting, diarrhea, fatigue, runny nose or stuffy nose, and headache.
 - Do not go to work if you become sick.
 - Find more information about what to do when you are sick by visiting RIDOH's COVID-19 [webpage](#).

Privacy and Confidentiality

Who will get my test results?

- Your results are confidential and will only be released to you and RIDOH, as required by law. There are strict laws in place protecting your confidentiality and restricting how health authorities can use and share your information.
- CDC and other researchers will see **de-identified** test results, meaning that they will get test results for everyone, but will not receive your name, contact information, or any other information that could be used to identify you.

Will my employer get my test results?

- No, individual test results will not be shared with your employer. Employers will receive only a general summary about the test results collected at their site.

How will you make sure my privacy is maintained if I choose to participate in this survey?

- There are strict laws in place to protect your privacy and confidentiality if you choose to participate in this survey. Only trained laboratory and administrative personnel will have access to your blood sample and personal information. Your test results will be shared with RIDOH in a secure manner.
- The websites we are using to take your information and share test results are encrypted, as are the text messages and links you will receive. All computer programs and databases are secured with firewalls and have advanced security precautions.