

Memorandum



Metropolitan Transportation Authority

State of New York

DATE: April 28, 2020

TO: Agency Presidents

FROM: Patrick T. Warren, Chief Safety Officer

RE: BioReference Antibody Program – Testing Protocol

Governor Cuomo has prioritized expanded COVID-19 antibody testing throughout New York State, starting with health care workers, public transit employees, and other first responders and essential employees. To advance this effort, the State has partnered with BioReference Laboratories (“BioReference”) to administer COVID-19 antibody testing. Beginning April 29, 2020, MTA employees will have the opportunity to participate in the BioReference Antibody Program. Priority will be given to personnel designated as essential, performing critical operational roles.

Participation in the testing program is **voluntary**, and the tests will be provided at **no cost** to MTA employees. The BioReference Antibody Program is an opportunity for essential MTA employees to receive streamlined, priority access for antibody tests that are not yet widely available. These tests will provide employees with the latest available information on their health status as it pertains to COVID-19 exposure. Please see the attached handout from the NYS Department of Health concerning antibody testing. As the New York State Department of Health attachment states, whether a person is immune won’t be known until persons with antibodies are exposed again to SARS-CoV-2 and studies can be done on whether any of them are infected again. It is also not known how long the antibodies will last.

Additional antibody testing also allows New York State to better estimate the overall infection rate, which in turn helps inform public health recommendations and the reopening strategy for New York.

This document outlines the process for MTA employees to request and receive antibody testing through the BioReference Antibody Program. Individuals currently exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms (e.g. temperature above 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit, dry cough, shortness of breath) cannot receive testing. If an employee previously contracted COVID-19, three full weeks (21 days) must have elapsed since the onset of their symptoms to be eligible for testing. All other asymptomatic employees who have not been diagnosed with COVID-19 are eligible for testing.

The volume of antibody testing completed through the BioReference Antibody Program is dependent upon employee demand and available supply of antibody tests. The process is outlined below. Further information on schedule and testing locations will be issued in the coming days.

1. Employees will register online (bioreferencelabs.secure.force.com/MTA/) for antibody testing and select an available time slot that supports your operations at one of the identified testing locations. The attached information paper from BioReference further explains how to access registration for testing.
2. Employees will report to the testing site at their appointed time to complete necessary intake forms and have their blood drawn by BioReference medical staff. During this intake process, non-disclosure procedures will be explained to employees.
3. Employees will be able to access their test results online within 24-48 hours.

Regardless of test results, employees should continue to follow all COVID-19 health guidance and precautions including proper PPE use, good hygiene, and social distancing.

NYS COVID-19 (CORONAVIRUS) ANTIBODY TESTING FOR MTA

GETTING TESTED

Please ensure that you are wearing a mask when you enter the testing site and that you observe social distancing rules. Staff at the testing site will check your ID and register you for testing. Only one tube of blood will be taken and fasting is not necessary for this test.

ACCESSING YOUR TEST RESULTS

Please register for the BioReference Patient Portal to view your results once they are final:

- Go to **bioreference.com/view-results**
- Click the **CREATE AN ACCOUNT** button
- Complete the registration process
- Login and click the red **COVID-19 Results – Blood collection (Antibodies)** link at the top of the page.
Your results will be available in the patient portal once testing is complete, so please continue to check back periodically.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR TEST RESULTS

The COVID-19 antibody test uses a blood sample to identify the presence of antibodies to the novel coronavirus disease 2019. Antibodies are proteins produced by the body's immune system to try to fight infection.

You will receive two results for COVID-19 antibody testing. The first will tell you whether you are negative, equivocal or positive for having antibodies and the second will give you the numerical level of measured antibodies found in your blood. Below are possible result values you could receive:

Negative: Your results do not detect significant antibodies to COVID-19. It is likely that you have not been exposed to the virus, or are in the early stages of COVID-19 infection when IgG antibodies are not yet detectable. Low levels of measured antibodies can be found in negative results but do not indicate prior infection with COVID-19.

Equivocal: Your results are inconclusive for antibodies to COVID-19 infection. While you do have some antibodies, your levels are not high enough to yield a positive result. IgG antibodies usually rise over time if you have been infected, so you may benefit from retesting at a later date.

Positive: Your results detect the presence of IgG antibodies to COVID-19 at levels above the threshold. This means that you may have been infected with COVID-19 in the past, and may now have immunity to re-infection. It is important to note that data on COVID-19 is still limited, and immunity to this virus may be significantly different than has previously been observed for others. Please discuss the meaning of a positive result with your healthcare provider, as COVID-19 information is rapidly being updated.

NYS COVID-19 (CORONAVIRUS) ANTIBODY TESTING FOR MTA

1

Schedule an appointment: <https://bioreferencelabs.secure.force.com/MTA/>

2

Come to the testing site on the day and time of your appointment. Please ensure that you are wearing a mask when you enter the testing site and that you observe social distancing rules.

- Staff at the testing site will check your ID and ensure that all information on file for you is correct. Below is some helpful information for the day of your test:

- Only one tube of blood will be taken.
- You do not need to fast for this test so you can make your appointment for any day or time that is available.

3

Register for the BioReference Patient Portal to view your results once they are final:

- Go to **bioreference.com/view-results**
- Click the **CREATE AN ACCOUNT** button
- Complete the registration process
- Login and click the red **COVID-19 Results – Blood collection (Antibodies)** link at the top of the page. Your results will be available in the patient portal once testing is complete, so please continue to check back periodically.

The Wadsworth Center (WC), the public health laboratory of the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH), has developed an antibody test for the virus that causes Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) disease. Below are several questions and answers that will address concerns you may have.

What is SARS-CoV-2?

SARS-CoV-2 stands for Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus Type 2, which is the name of the virus causing the current COVID-19 pandemic.

What is the Wadsworth Center's antibody test for SARS-CoV-2?

WC has developed a test for detecting IgG antibodies to SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. The test is a microsphere immunoassay (MIA) which can detect IgG antibodies in blood. The blood can be collected using a dried-blood spot card. Dried-blood spot specimens can be collected by pricking the finger and collecting drops of blood onto a paper card. The cards are dried and then shipped to the WC for testing.

What is an IgG antibody?

Antibodies develop when the immune system responds to a germ, usually a virus or a bacterium. With other diseases, IgG is one type of antibody that usually develops 3 to 4 weeks after infection with the germ and lasts for a long time. Once you have IgG antibodies, your immune system may recognize the germ and be able to fight it the next time you are exposed to it. Infection with the SARS-CoV-2 virus does seem to result in the production of IgG antibodies, though it isn't known exactly when that happens and if it happens to everybody.

What test results will be reported?

The results for this test are reported as reactive, nonreactive, or indeterminate. It is important to understand that this is a novel virus and we continue to advance in our understanding of COVID-19. Discuss any concerns or questions you may have about COVID-19 with your medical provider.

What does a reactive result mean?

A reactive result on this test indicates that IgG antibodies to SARS-CoV-2 were present in the blood specimen. A reactive result can mean you had infection with SARS-CoV-2 in the past or it can mean you are currently infected. If you did not test positive for SARS-CoV-2 already, another test may be needed to see if you are currently infected*

**Note: A reactive result may be due to past or present infection with non-SARS-CoV-2 strains. However, specificity for the Wadsworth Center (WC) SARS-CoV-2 IgG test has been determined to be 93 to 100%. Therefore, significant cross-reactivity to other known respiratory viruses is not expected.*

What does a nonreactive result mean?

A nonreactive result on this test means that IgG antibodies to SARS-CoV-2 were not present in the blood. However, you may still be infected with SARS-CoV-2. An additional test would be needed to determine if you are infected or not. This test is called a molecular diagnostic test and can be done with a swab of your nose or throat or a test of your spit.

What does an indeterminate result mean?

An indeterminate result means that the test did not produce a clear nonreactive or reactive result. This could happen if the test reacted with other antibodies in the blood or if you do have SARS-CoV-2 IgG antibodies but the levels are still too low to be reported as reactive.

Is a person with a reactive result on the WC SARS-CoV-2 IgG test immune to COVID-19?

This won't be known until people who have IgG levels are exposed again to SARS-CoV-2 and we can study whether any of them are infected again. It is also not known how long the IgG antibodies will last. It will take time to find these answers. In the meantime, this test is the best we can do to indicate some sort of immunity.

Can a health care worker who has a reactive SARS-CoV-2 IgG test return to work?

It is not known whether having IgG antibodies means that you are still infected or are immune. Therefore, you need to follow the NYSDOH guidelines for returning to work. They can be found at <https://coronavirus.health.ny.gov/information-healthcare-providers>.

It is recommended that health care workers continue to follow the current COVID-19 infection control precautions, including continuing to wear PPE. This test is not required to return to work.

Who should be tested for SARS-CoV-2 IgG?

SARS-CoV-2 IgG can provide information about your immune status. However, IgG antibodies are usually produced weeks after the initial infection. Therefore, this test should not be conducted until at least 21 days have passed since you had a positive viral (molecular diagnostic) test or the symptoms of COVID-19 started.

If you were already tested and the results were negative, or you have never been tested and you have been exposed to the virus at work or at home, you can also be tested using the dried-blood spot test.

For more information on COVID-19 in NYS go to: <https://health.ny.gov/coronavirus>