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Macon County
Public Health

Press Release

COVID-19 Antibody Tests Are Coming: What Do We Know About Them?

Up until now, almost all COVID-19 testing completed and reported have been antigen tests. These tests look for the presence of the actual antigen SARS-CoV-2 (aka COVID-19). If these antigens are found it indicates the virus is present and is likely capable of infecting and causing illness. Therefore, testing for the actual virus has been an indication of an acute infection. We know much more about these tests and their meaning than we do about the coming antibody testing.

What is an Antibody and Antibody Testing?

Antibody testing looks at the body's immune response to the virus, rather than antigen focused testing as mentioned above. Antigens are molecules recognized as foreign to our bodies. The immune system responds by making antibodies to attach to these foreign antigens. From there, antibodies block or kill the antigen in an attempt to prevent infection and illness.

The Concern with Antibody Testing?

Although antibodies are helpful to fight off infection, they are not always able to differentiate between the portions of the antigen that cause illness and the portions that do not. This is a concern when it comes to antibody testing because it is not specific enough to identify if these antibodies were created against the portion of the antigen specifically responsible for infection with the virus and if they are unique to COVID-19 or related to another strain of Coronavirus, like SARS or MERS.

Ultimately, the new antibody testing, will be beneficial to our understanding of the immune response to COVID-19; however, it is not specific enough to determine whether short-term or long-term immunity is provided from the antibodies. Antibody testing can only show the presence of antibodies that have been created in response to the COVID-19 antigen, but it cannot determine if the antibodies were created from the infectious portion, thus testing is not able to determine the level of immunity provided.

It is important to make sure the information you are getting about COVID-19 is coming directly from reliable sources like Macon County Public Health, CDC, and NCDHHS. For more information, please visit the CDC's website at www.cdc.gov/coronavirus and NCDHHS' website at www.ncdhhs.gov/coronavirus, which will also include future positive COVID-19 test results in North Carolina.

Macon County Public Health regularly updates our Facebook page with accurate and current information regarding COVID-19; we encourage the public to check our Facebook page, www.facebook.com/MaconPublicHealth for up-to-date information.

Symptoms for COVID-19 are fever, cough, and other lower respiratory illness (shortness of breath). If you believe that you may have COVID-19, please call the Health Department at 828-349-2517.

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