

FAQs for SARS-CoV-2 PCR Testing of Health Care Personnel  
August 14, 2020 (Replaces FAQs posted on May 18, 2020)

## Key Updates

1. Due to rapidly changing COVID-19 hot spots throughout the U.S., Workforce Health & Safety (WHS) guidance still encourages HCP to avoid non-essential travel.
2. For HCP returning from travel to a U.S. state or territory with high rates of COVID-19 community transmission, New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) requires such HCP to be tested within 24 hours of returning from travel and be SARS-CoV-2 negative before returning to work.  
[coronavirus.health.ny.gov/covid-19-travel-advisory](https://coronavirus.health.ny.gov/covid-19-travel-advisory)
3. HCP returning from travel should plan to include 2-3 days for testing and receiving test results prior to returning to work.
4. HCP returning from travel should be aware of local testing facilities in case they prefer to be tested closer to home. These links provide testing locations:
  - o [New York State COVID-19 Test Finder](#)
  - o [HHS.gov COVID-19 Community Testing Finder](#)
5. NYP will continue to provide SARS-CoV-2 PCR testing for the following:
  - o HCP with symptoms consistent with COVID-19
  - o HCP returning from U.S. states or territory with the NYSDOH travel advisory who require a negative SARS-CoV-2 PCR test to return to work
  - o HCP confirmed to have a work-related exposure to SARS-CoV-2
  - o HCP working/rotating in NYP Nursing home facilities

This FAQ guidance describes SARS-CoV-2 PCR testing, interpreting results from symptomatic and asymptomatic health care personnel (HCP), and current testing guidance for HCP.

### 1. What is the difference between SARS-CoV-2 and COVID-19?

SARS-CoV-2 is the new coronavirus that causes COVID-19 illness.

### 2. What kinds of tests are used at NYP to determine if people have COVID-19?

There are currently two different types of tests for COVID-19:

- o One is a nasopharyngeal (NP) swab used to detect the RNA of SARS-CoV-2 by PCR.
- o One is the serology blood test used to detect antibodies to SARS-CoV-2.

### 3. How is the NP swab test done?

A sterile, small, cotton-tipped swab is gently passed into the nose back to the nasopharynx to obtain respiratory tract secretions, rotated, removed, placed in viral transport media, and sent to the laboratory for testing.

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**4. What does the NP swab test measure?**

The test detects the SARS-CoV-2 viral genetic material (RNA). PCR assays can detect live virus, dead virus, or fragments of virus.

**5. What are the current NYP recommendations for testing HCP for SARS-CoV-2?**

The NP PCR test is currently recommended for the following:

- HCP with symptoms consistent with COVID-19: documented fever  $\geq 100^{\circ}$  F or subjective fever, cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, chills or shaking chills, nasal congestion, diarrhea, headache, change in taste, or loss of smell.
- HCP returning from states or territories with the NYSDOH travel advisory who require a negative SARS-CoV-2 PCR test to return to work (see Question 6)
- HCP confirmed to have a work-related exposure to SARS-CoV-2
- HCP working/ rotating in NYP Nursing home facilities

**6. What is the NYS DOH travel advisory for HCP?**

HCP returning from a state or territory deemed by the NYS DOH to have high case rates based on 7-day rolling averages must be tested for SARS-CoV-2 within 24 hours of returning from travel: [coronavirus.health.ny.gov/covid-19-travel-advisory](https://coronavirus.health.ny.gov/covid-19-travel-advisory)  
Their SARS-CoV-2 test must be negative to return to work. HCP who travel should arrange their travel schedule to accommodate timely testing to return to work.

**7. How do HCP arrange for their NP swab test?**

HCP should call the Workforce Health & Safety (WHS) **COVID-19 HOTLINE 646-697-9470** to arrange testing. Testing will only be available by appointment through WHS Hotline. Appointment slots are subject to availability at each NYP location.

**8. How do HCP get their NP swab test results?**

Results will be delivered via Connect <https://www.myconnectnyc.org/MyChart/signup>

- If HCP already have a Connect account, they can log into <https://www.myconnectnyc.org/> or download the app.
- Once the account is created, results can be seen by clicking on the View Test Results link on the right-hand side of the page.

It will take about 24-48 hours to get the PCR test results back. WHS will call HCP with their test results and guidance for return to work if the test result is SARS-CoV-2-positive.

**9. Can HCP be tested by a provider other than WHS?**

Yes, HCP can be tested by other providers as long as the appropriate test for SARS-CoV-2 is performed. The test must detect SARS-CoV-2 RNA (e.g., PCR, nucleic acid amplification) from a respiratory tract specimen (e.g., NP swab, oropharyngeal swab, nasal swab, mid-turbinate swab). Testing for SARS-CoV-2 antigen, the use of saliva as the only specimen for testing, or antibody testing for SARS-CoV-2 are NOT

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appropriate. HCP must obtain written documentation of their results that includes the test date, their name, another identifier (e.g., date of birth), type of test, and test result.

HCP returning from travel should plan to include 2-3 days for testing and receiving test results prior to returning to work. HCP returning from travel should be aware of local testing facilities in case they prefer to be tested closer to home. These links provide testing locations:

- [New York State COVID-19 Test Finder](#)
- [HHS.gov COVID-19 Community Testing Finder](#)

**10. In HCP with symptoms, what does a positive (“detected”) NP swab test result mean?**

A positive PCR result from a HCP with symptoms means that a person has COVID-19 and can infect others, and needs to be isolated at home. Provide the **Guidance for NYP HCP with COVID-19 to help protect their household members**:  
[https://infonet.nyp.org/EPI/Pages/Covid19/COVID-19\\_Discharge\\_Instructions.aspx](https://infonet.nyp.org/EPI/Pages/Covid19/COVID-19_Discharge_Instructions.aspx)

WHS clearance is needed to return to work. Return to work criteria include:

- At least 10 days have passed since the onset of symptoms
- At least 24 hours have passed without fever without the use of antipyretic medications, e.g., Tylenol, ibuprofen
- Marked improvement in symptoms (e.g., cough, shortness of breath)

**Note:** HCP who have previously tested positive for SARS-CoV-2 should continue to use all protective measures against COVID-19 at work or in the community because we do not know if someone can be re-infected.

**11. In HCP without symptoms, what does a positive (“detected”) NP swab test result mean?**

The PCR test can detect both live and dead virus (or viral RNA fragments). A positive PCR test in someone without symptoms could mean any of the following:

- A person is pre-symptomatic (prior to the onset of symptoms) or asymptomatic (never will develop symptoms), but is infected with SARS-CoV-2 and can infect others.
- A person (without symptoms) has recovered from the virus, but is still shedding virus and can infect others.
- A person (without symptoms) has recovered from the virus and the PCR is detecting dead virus or viral RNA fragments, and the person cannot infect others.

For these reasons, asymptomatic HCP who are SARS-CoV-2-positive need to isolate at home. Provide the **Guidance for NYP HCP with COVID-19 to help protect their**

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**household members:** [https://infonyet.nyp.org/EPI/Pages/Covid19/COVID-19\\_Discharge\\_Instructions.aspx](https://infonyet.nyp.org/EPI/Pages/Covid19/COVID-19_Discharge_Instructions.aspx)

WHS clearance is needed to return to work. Return to work criteria include:

- 10 days have passed since the date of the positive PCR test
- No symptoms have developed

**Note:** : HCP who test SARS-CoV-2 positive should continue to use all protective measures against COVID-19 at work or in the community because we do not know if someone can be re-infected.

**12. Does an HCP with a POSTIVE PCR test need a follow-up NEGATIVE PCR test to return to work?**

No. A repeat negative PCR test is not required to return to work. An HCP can return to work as per WHS clearance criteria described above.

**13. In HCP with symptoms, what does a negative (“not detected”) NP swab test result mean?**

A negative PCR test in someone without symptoms could mean any of the following:

- A false negative test, meaning that a person does have COVID-19, but that the PCR test did not detect virus because the level of viral RNA was below the limit of detection. Levels of viral RNA are usually highest in the first 5 days of illness.
- A false negative test can also occur due to inadequate or improper NP swab collection.
- A negative test from a HCP who previously had symptoms and is now well may mean that a person has cleared the virus and can't spread the virus to others.
- Sometimes people with symptoms can have a negative test because they have other reasons for their symptoms such as seasonal allergies, asthma, or another virus.

**14. In HCP without symptoms, what does a negative (“not detected”) NP swab test result mean?**

It is likely that a person without symptoms with a negative NP PCR test does not have COVID-19. HCP are always at risk, and should always self-monitor for symptoms of COVID-19.

**15. Can an asymptomatic HCP who is tested work while waiting for their NP swab test result?**

Yes. The asymptomatic HCP can continue to work while waiting for their test result. They should continue to wear a surgical mask whenever they are around others and wear appropriate PPE for patient care. The only exception is someone returning

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from a state or territory on the NYSDOH travel advisory. These HCP can ONLY return to work if their test is negative.

**16. What does an indeterminate test result mean?**

Occasionally a person will have an indeterminate NP PCR test result. This is considered a positive result and represents a low level of virus. See Question 9 and 10 above. An indeterminate test does **NOT** need to be repeated.

**17. What does an invalid test result mean?**

Occasionally, a person will have an invalid NP PCR test result, which is the result of excessive mucus in the sample interfering with the test. This person **SHOULD** have a repeat NP swab sent for SARS-CoV-2 testing.