



News Release

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CCH provides overview of COVID-19 diagnostic and antibody tests

For Immediate Release

(COLUMBUS, Neb.) – In general, there are two types of tests for COVID-19 – nasopharyngeal tests or “molecular tests” that are used for the diagnosis of the virus and antibody tests which are also commonly called “serologic tests.”

Current infections of COVID-19 are diagnosed with the molecular tests using nasal/nasopharyngeal swabs. These tests are available in the Columbus Community Hospital laboratory and can also be sent to national reference laboratories.

The second type of COVID-19 testing is an antibody test which is primarily intended to detect recent or past exposure to COVID-19. An antibody test is performed with a blood draw since the antibody to the virus may take about 7-14 days to develop after infection and is able to be detected in a person’s blood.

These antibody tests can be drawn at CCH or a physician’s office and are sent to national reference laboratories.

Although testing for antibodies for other viruses has been available for some time, the meaning of antibody tests for COVID-19 are not yet clear since the virus is so new. Experts believe that the COVID-19 antibody test could be a tool to help determine how COVID-19 spreads. They also believe it could help determine how many people in a population have been exposed, and whether it is safe to open up or relax restrictions in a community.

But even though the test detects antibodies in the blood, that may not mean that someone with COVID-19 antibodies and a positive COVID-19 antibody test is immune to COVID-19. Experts don’t know how many antibodies people need to have in their blood to prevent catching the virus again and how long the antibodies last. Some experts also believe that a lack of antibodies or a negative result in an antibody test does not mean a person hasn’t been exposed to the virus.

Population studies, such as one that is being performed on Omaha firefighters at the University of Nebraska Medical Center, in conjunction with a national reference laboratory, may help answer some of these questions.



“Other facilities are also gaining experience with the antibody test and the antibody test may have a better-defined role in the foreseeable future,” said Dr. Steffan R. Lacey, CCH medical laboratory director. “For now, however, whether a positive coronavirus antibody test confers immunity to the person is not definitively known. At this point in time, the antibody tests are not used for diagnosis of current or ongoing infections.”

For more on CCH’s policies regarding COVID-19 and what it is doing to keep its patients and community members safe, visit www.columbushosp.org.

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