

5/14/20-- Uinta County COVID-19 Update



CORONAVIRUS ANTIBODY TESTING: THE REALITY DOESN'T MEET OUR HOPES... YET

--We would really, *really* like to know if we already had it, and if we're protected and non-contagious.... But that's not yet what the antibody tests tell us.

Thus far, antibody testing has some issues when it comes to both diagnosing and giving us accurate information as to whether or not someone has had COVID-19 and are immune.

In antibody testing, or serology testing, a person's blood is checked for the presence of special proteins that our bodies make, called antibodies. These are signs that your immune system encountered a virus or other pathogen and responded to it.

For many diseases, the presence of these antibodies means your immune system is prepared to fight that virus, and you are protected from reinfection from the diseases' pathogen. That premise is the basis for prevention of diseases through vaccines.

There are a few limitations with this type of testing and our understanding of the SARS-CoV-2 virus thus far:

1. The current antibody tests have not yet shown the kind of specificity we would like. This means that it is possible that a positive test could be triggered by antibodies to other common coronaviruses (like those that cause the common cold.) We aren't yet sure that it means that you certainly had COVID-19.
2. These tests cannot tell us if a person is currently infectious or not, and are not recommended for diagnosing COVID-19.
3. Their accuracy is really variable. This means false positives are quite possible.
4. Having antibodies, unfortunately, doesn't automatically mean that an individual is immune, and we don't know how long potential immunity lasts. This virus still has a lot of unknowns, including these important bits of information.
5. There are a lot of un-validated and even fraudulent antibody tests out there. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has just tightened down the requirements for being able to market tests, because of the more than 100 tests that have popped up with very variable accuracy.

Research and improvements on these tests are ongoing, because antibody testing and the understanding it could give us is very important to our future course in managing the virus.

Until more is known and the tests are more specific and sensitive, the antibody test results are just one piece of a person's picture when it comes to COVID-19.

The more common test currently used to diagnose COVID-19 is called rt-PCR, and detects the actual presence of the virus in the mucous of the back of the throat.

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