May 20, 2020

Surry County Media Campaign Day 8: Antibody Testing

There is a lot of talk about COVID-19 testing in the news today, and with this talk comes confusion about the types of tests and how they differ. Antibody testing determines if your body has been exposed to COVID-19 by detecting antibodies against the virus.

Antibody testing, or serology testing, is performed after a person fully recovers from COVID-19. Once a person's body is exposed to COVID-19, the immune system produces antibodies, which are proteins that are critical for fighting and clearing out the virus. Antibody testing is completed by analyzing a blood sample to determine whether the sample contains antibodies against COVID-19.

If test results conclude that a person has antibodies for COVID-19, they were likely infected with the virus at some point. It may also mean that they have acquired some immunity to the virus; however, there is little evidence supporting that having antibodies means you are protected against reinfection with COVID-19. The level of immunity and how long immunity lasts are not yet known.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has authorized and verified certain antibody tests, but there are some tests on the market with questionable accuracy. When accurate antibody testing becomes more widely available, results may indicate how many people have had COVID-19 and recovered, including those who did not have symptoms. This will help our public health authorities with contact tracing to assess who else is at risk of infection and how widespread COVID-19 is in our communities. All of the data collected through diagnostic and antibody testing will assist in improving strategies to curb the COVID-19 pandemic.

Access to antibody testing depends on test availability and if you are eligible for testing. Collaborative efforts between federal, state, and local agencies to make more testing available is ongoing. Until then, it is imperative to continue practicing social distancing of at least 6 feet and wearing a cloth face covering when in a community setting.

To stay up-to-date on COVID-19 in North Carolina and to learn more, visit ncdhhs.gov/coronavirus or text COVIDNC to 898211. Call 2-1-1 (or 888-892-1162) for general questions or for help finding human services resources in your community.