

Esteemed Public Safety Colleagues,

You may have seen ads for companies and medical practices marketing antibody tests for COVID-19. These tests could theoretically identify people who have recovered from COVID-19, and may have developed immunity to the virus.

Of the approximately 90 antibody tests on the market, very few have received Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) from the FDA. Some of these tests have been found to be very inaccurate, giving false negative results in people who were known to have had the virus, as well as giving false positive results in people that have never had it. They may falsely indicate antibodies to COVID-19 when in reality, the patient has antibodies to another coronavirus, like the common cold. Some of these tests have even been banned by national governments due to their unreliable results.

Additionally, some of the tests that obtained EUAs were validated in areas where COVID-19 is far more prevalent. The estimated community prevalence in Austin is just 1% of the population, meaning that we'd have to run about 600 tests, to find 1 true positive.

We do NOT recommend taking these tests, even those with EUAs, until further evaluation of them has been done. Even if any are accurate, what to do with that information is up for debate. At this point, they are a waste of your money, and worse, may cause you to alter behavior that would otherwise protect you.

Antibodies do not appear for several days to weeks after infection. An antibody test is NOT a good screen for current or recent infection. Acute infection can only be diagnosed by a PCR test, which is the current gold standard for COVID-19 detection, and what we use at all Austin Public Health testing sites.

A positive result from one of these current antibody tests does NOT mean you are immune to COVID-19 and should NOT lead you to take fewer precautions to avoid contracting it, or spreading the virus to your families or the public. Additionally, it may cause undue anxiety about having the virus or potential complications in the future.

If you are a first responder or critical infrastructure city or county employee, and have ANY symptom that suggests COVID-19, you may either enroll for testing via the Public Enrollment Tool at COVID19.AustinTexas.gov, or if you have questions, contact the ATCEMS COVID Clinical Consult Line at (737) 210-9740.

Thank you for everything you do,

Dr. Mark Escott

In collaboration with:

