

# A negative COVID-19 test is not always accurate

## The limitations of testing and false negatives



Community testing is occurring throughout the country as well as in Indian Country. **The United South and Eastern Tribes Tribal Epidemiology Center (USET TEC) wants to inform you about the limitations of testing and false negatives.** Ideally community screening specific to COVID-19 should be conducted when accurate tests are readily available for use, and sufficient resources to provide robust monitoring and patient follow up are in place. Currently not all testing locations are using the most accurate tests available. It needs to be known that many negative COVID-19 test results should be evaluated with a level of uncertainty. Therefore, the USET TEC cannot recommend community screening with the current available tests at this time.

**We have discovered a lack of public awareness that there are different types of COVID-19 testing. The most common is the Abbott Test: ID Now COVID-19.** This test is fast, taking between 10-15 minutes for results. USET TEC and Abbott advise against the use of ID Now COVID-19 for community testing. The sensitivity and specificity of the ID Now COVID-19 test is currently unknown and this is unsettling, however, what is even more concerning is that Tribal nations across the country are reporting a false negative rate of up to 25 percent as a result of its prevalent use. Therefore we can not support conducting community testing programs with ID Now COVID-19.

**The second most common test is known as RT-PCR COVID-19.** It takes approximately three hours for results and has a false negative rate of 10 to 35 percent, due mainly to suboptimal sampling technique and degradation during specimen transport. Implementing community screening could possibly contribute to a higher false negative rate due to the increased demand on laboratory personnel. Without a clinical evaluation before the test, and clinical follow-up after test results come back, a false negative test could easily result in an infected patient not being isolated, and subsequently spreading the infection to family members and other contacts.

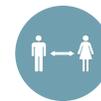
**PCR testing generally provides more reliable results when compared to molecular tests like ID Now COVID-19.** In the case that the infrastructure and capacity to implement community testing exists, the USET TEC recommends a drive-thru testing model using the COVID-19 PCR test with appropriate clinical support, public health follow up, and community education.



COVID-19 Testing



Hand Washing



Social Distancing



Face Covering

### Interpreting COVID-19 Test Results and Making Informed Public Health Decisions

Due to apparent inconsistencies in the reliability and accuracy of the COVID-19 testing currently in place, positive and negative test results should be deciphered carefully to make appropriate clinical and public health related decisions. Preventive measures such as handwashing practices and social distancing should be emphasized regardless of test results to protect healthy individuals and decrease the spread of COVID-19.

**Patients should also be educated on symptoms, preventive measures, and general education regarding COVID-19 to counteract the misinformation and anxiety about the disease.** USET TEC can't emphasize enough that the use of cloth masks among all people while in public settings (i.e.- grocery stores, essential businesses) needs to be implemented in Indian Country to assist in decreasing the spread of COVID-19 from those who are infected but asymptomatic to those that are healthy.

Please visit the following link for more information on the use of cloth masks:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html>



[www.TribalEpiCenters.org](http://www.TribalEpiCenters.org)