

MEDICAL DIRECTORS CORNER

We are now almost over a full year of this pandemic with COVID-19. A lot is still unclear but many more realizations have emerged. What we do know is that a vaccine has been developed on numerous fronts and by different laboratories, two of which Pfizer and Moderna are being made available to people in the United States; initially healthcare workers and seniors will be the first to receive the vaccine. What else is significant is that two new medical studies have suggested that people who are infected with COVID-19 are unlikely to test positive again with a nasal smear test for up to six months or so. Researchers found that people with antibodies from natural infections also were at slightly lower risk on the order of the same protection you get from a vaccine, of getting the virus again (COVID-19). This is according to Dr. Ned Sharpless, director of the US National Cancer Institute who conducted one of the studies.

Both of these studies use two types of tests. One is a blood test for antibodies, the same type of antibodies that we test for in terms of IgG for longer immunity and IgM for initial immunity. The blood test for antibodies which attach to a virus and help eliminate it show that antibodies can linger for many months after infection. The other type of test uses nasal or other samples to detect the virus or bits of the virus suggesting current or recent infection.

One study published by the New England Journal of Medicine involved more than 12,000 healthcare workers in the United Kingdom. Among almost 1300 who had the coronavirus; antibodies at the outset (IgM then IgG), only two had positive results on tests to detect active infection during the immediate six months following the positive results.

That contrasts with over 11,000 healthcare workers who initially did not have antibodies; 223 of them tested positive for infection in the roughly six months that followed.

The National Cancer Institute study that we talked about before involved more than 3 million people who had antibody tests from two private labs in the United States. Less than 1% of those who initially had antibodies (IgM and IgG) later tested positive for the coronavirus, compared with 3% of those who lack such antibodies.

Antibodies themselves may not be the protection that people need. They might just be a sign that other parts of the immune system are able to fight off any new exposures to the virus; The New England Journal Of Medicine reports.

One of the most important things for all of us to consider is that nobody really knows how long lasting this immunity is. Cases of people getting COVID-19 again have been reported, and in fact there is now a more active variant of the virus in the United Kingdom which is infecting people at a higher rate, although nobody is clear if the symptoms are any worse.

WHAT ALL THIS MEANS IS THAT GETTING YOUR ANTIBODY TEST AND DOING IT IN THE MOST SIGNIFICANT SIMPLE STRAIGHTFORWARD AT HOME WAY IS STILL A VALUABLE TOOL IN TERMS OF SEEING WHERE YOU STAND IN THIS CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC.

We are certainly here to assist you with any results that arise be they negative or positive. We have been doing this steadily for all our patients throughout the entire testing period.

Another important thing to note is that the FDA has just cleared the way for over-the-counter nasal swab tests to confirm active infection. These are not tests for antibodies like the test that we have, but a check (over-the-counter) for active infection. That over-the-counter test may complement the blood test for antibodies that we provide several weeks after a positive result.

It has emerged without question after a significant debate that social distancing, the washing of hands, and more importantly the wearing of masks can reduce exposure. We have covered this

on every aspect that there is from people that stated that masks do not do anything to other people who stated that only K95 or N95 masks are the ones that work. We now know without question that wearing a protective covering is significant in terms of preventing significant spread. Until “herd immunity” is acquired now that we have the vaccines, we still must judiciously abide by the social distance measures as well as wearing masks in as many places as we can.

Please do not take this virus playfully. It is a serious disease with serious consequences and the people that have survived it almost 87% of them according to two very good studies, have some long lasting side effects including fatigue, muscle pains, and difficulty breathing. No one knows how long these side effects may last.

Thank you for your support and we look forward to serving you.

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