



Chelan-Douglas Health District

200 Valley Mall Parkway, East Wenatchee, WA 98802

May 6, 2020

COVID-19 ANTIBODY TRACING

A SPECIAL MESSAGE FROM CHELAN-DOUGLAS HEALTH DISTRICT:

East Wenatchee, WA – Lab tests for COVID-19 antibodies have become available recently, and they are causing some confusion. CDHD wants you to have some basic facts about these tests.

These antibody tests do not tell a person whether he or she has COVID-19 now. Instead, they may show whether a person was exposed to the virus at some time in the past.

Tests for a current COVID-19 infection are different from the antibody tests. The tests for a current infection are still very useful and valid. But the antibody tests are a different animal entirely.

Many of the COVID-19 antibody tests on the market have unknown accuracy because FDA did not require the validation normally needed for new medical tests. FDA has changed that policy and is now trying to apply some quality standards to COVID-19 antibody tests already on the market.

But even if you get an accurate COVID-19 antibody test, no one knows its practical significance for an individual patient. Doctors do not know if having antibodies means you are immune to COVID-19, though there is probably some immunity. If antibodies do mean you are immune, nobody knows how long that will last. A month? A year? Unknown. If you think a positive antibody test means you can take more risks, you could be seriously mistaken.

Antibody tests for COVID-19 may soon be used in community studies to determine what portion of the population has been exposed to the virus. But there is currently no practical value for an individual to get the antibody test outside of such a study, except perhaps if you are curious.

Antibody tests for some other diseases are useful, because enough research has been done to show what they mean. There hasn't yet been time for that with COVID-19. When additional research is done, we may know what these results mean and COVID-19 antibody tests may be useful for individuals, but for now they are usually a waste of your money and your doctor's valuable time.

Additional Resources:

[Chelan-Douglas Health District](#)

[Washington State Department of Health](#)

[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)

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