

Q&A: Rapid COVID tests could hold the key to reopening

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USC researchers are collaborating with Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti and the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health on a multiphase project to examine the use of coronavirus rapid antigen tests among first responders and school-aged children.

Neeraj Sood, director of the COVID Initiative at the USC Schaeffer Center for Health Policy & Economics and USC lead on the collaboration, answers questions:

What are you studying, and why?

We're trying to understand whether rapid antigen tests, which detect proteins from the coronavirus, can reliably identify people who are contagious but not showing symptoms so that we can break the chain of transmission. These tests show a lot of promise because they are inexpensive and can give results within a few minutes. We also want to address the challenges associated with using these tests in schools and workplaces.

How are these tests different from the current

"gold standard" PCR tests?

PCR tests are lab-based and very accurate. Results can take several days and it's considerably more expensive. These tests are extremely sensitive and produce positive results even when a person is no longer contagious to others. An easy-to-use rapid test that accurately tells you whether you're contagious could be a game-changer.

When will Phase 1, a study involving up to 1,000 firefighters, be complete?

In two weeks.

When is Phase 2 expected to begin?

In the next few weeks, by the end of November, it will have started.

Who can participate in Phase 2?

Phase 2 will be open to [school-aged children](#) and their parents who are receiving a regular PCR test at any of the participating L.A. testing sites. Not all of the city's testing sites will have this rapid antigen test. When the parent signs up online to make their PCR testing appointment, upon entering the age of their child, if he or she meets the age requirements for the test, the parent will also be asked if they want to participate in the rapid antigen test pilot program. If they say yes, then they will be given the rapid test, along with their regular PCR test, at the testing site.

What is the age range of "school-aged children" included in Phase 2?

Ages 5 to 18 years, so children in grades K-12.

Will participants of the rapid antigen test be able to immediately see their results on site in Phase 2?

No. Since this is a research study and these tests haven't been authorized by the FDA for testing asymptomatic persons, the results from the antigen test will not be available. Participants will be notified of their PCR [test](#) results.

What will happen in Phase 3?

Phase 3 is still in development; it will involve collaboration with schools that are interested in participating in rapid antigen testing in an institutional environment. We are still looking to recruit volunteer participants.

More information: School administrators interested in participating in this study can email COVIDstudy@healthpolicy.usc.edu for more information.

Provided by University of Southern California

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