



First Nations Health Authority  
Health through wellness

# COVID-19 testing equipment in First Nations communities

The First Nations Health Authority (FNHA) has three types of equipment to test for the virus that causes COVID-19.



## GENEXPERT

*This is the “gold standard” – the best (most accurate / sensitive) test of the 3 to show if you have COVID-19 or not, but the equipment requires lots of training of health care providers and takes up a lot of physical space. Results take longer to get (about 50 minutes).*

- Large instrument and computer, takes up a lot of space on a desktop
- Test is a nose swab or throat gargle (“saline gargle”)
- Test is considered “diagnostic” – reliably tells you if you have COVID-19 or not



## ID NOW

*ID NOW gets quicker results than GeneXpert (about 15 minutes) and it is easier for a nurse to use, but it is less accurate (sensitive) at showing if you have COVID-19 than GeneXpert.*

- Small instrument that sits on a desktop (the size of a toaster)
- Test is a nose or throat swab
- Test is used for “screening” for COVID-19; a positive test means you *probably* have COVID-19
- However, this test cannot “rule out” COVID-19, because a person’s body may not have enough of the virus for the equipment to detect (in other words, a negative test doesn’t mean you’re COVID-19-free)



## PANBIO

*Test is very small and fits in one’s hand. This is the easiest for a health care provider to use, and they will get results quickly (15-20 minutes). But this is less accurate (sensitive) than GeneXpert or ID NOW.*

- Small test the health care provider can hold in their hand (about the size of a cell phone)
- Test is a nose swab
- Test is used for “screening” for COVID-19; a positive test means you *probably* have COVID-19
- However, this test cannot “rule out” COVID-19, because a person’s body may not have enough of the virus for the equipment to detect (in other words, a negative test doesn’t mean you’re COVID-19-free)

This equipment is used as part of BC’s and Canada’s public health response to COVID-19, and testing occurs in a coordinated way with BC’s regional health authorities. Tests are done by regulated health care providers who have specialized training.

## WHAT DOES THIS TESTING EQUIPMENT DO?

All three of these types of “community based testing” equipment test for the virus that causes COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2). The **GENEXPERT** more accurately tests if you have the virus. It will detect the virus if even a small amount of it is in your body.

**ID NOW** and **PANBIO** can often show us if a person has COVID-19, but there may be a need to take another sample for further testing. If you get a negative test from **ID NOW** or **PANBIO**, we don't yet know if you have COVID-19, so another sample will need to be taken for testing – on **GENEXPERT** equipment or in a laboratory.

Although not yet approved in Canada, **GENEXPERT** and **ID NOW** equipment can also be used to test for other viruses and bacteria, including those that cause the flu. **PANBIO** kits can only test for COVID-19. **GENEXPERT** is the only one of the three that is accepted for showing if people have COVID-19 when they return to Canada from other countries.

## HOW ARE THE TESTS DONE? HOW DOES A HEALTH CARE PROVIDER GET A SAMPLE?

Testing with this equipment is done by regulated health care providers, who will get a sample from:

- **ID NOW** AND **PANBIO**: *most likely* from your nose with a swab, but a sample for **ID NOW** can also be from your throat
- **GENEXPERT**: from your mouth by swishing / gargling with salt water (“saline gargle”), or from a deep nose swab – all the way back to your throat

All of these procedures take around 10-15 seconds to get the sample, except the mouth swishing which takes about 30 seconds.

## HOW LONG UNTIL I GET THE RESULTS?

A health care provider should contact you within 24 hours with the results.

## WHAT DO I DO WHILE WAITING FOR THE RESULTS – AND AFTERWARDS?

If you may have been in contact with someone who has COVID-19, or if you have any symptoms, it is important to stay at home and avoid contact with others (self-isolate) after your test – until you have follow-up from a health care provider. If the test is not positive, you may be asked to provide another sample.

## WHY DID SOME COMMUNITIES RECEIVE TESTING EQUIPMENT BEFORE OTHERS?

The FNHA has sent testing equipment to Nursing Stations and First Nations communities that have the community health nurses, physical space, and other needs to be able to run the equipment, including the capacity to take on the workload of this new service. Locations for testing equipment also need to have enough space to use the equipment (for example, **GENEXPERT** instruments require their own room for safe operation), back-up generators in case there are power outages, a fridge for storage, Internet access, and the ability to transport swabs/samples for testing.

The FNHA has also prioritized communities that are more rural and remote, especially those that are far from an acute care hospital with critical care capacity where people can get a lab test and treatment for COVID-19, where transportation into community is difficult, and areas where there is a long turn-around time to get lab test results. Lastly, FNHA is only sending testing equipment to communities where there is support from leadership and the community. Communities that already have effective testing systems in place have not been prioritized for this testing equipment.