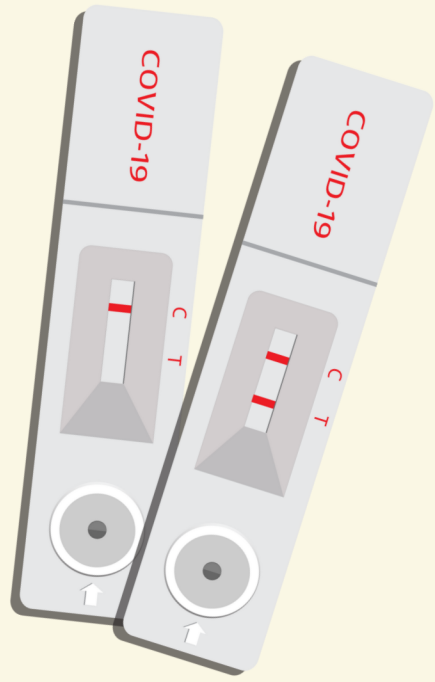
a guide to

Rapid test

Reliability



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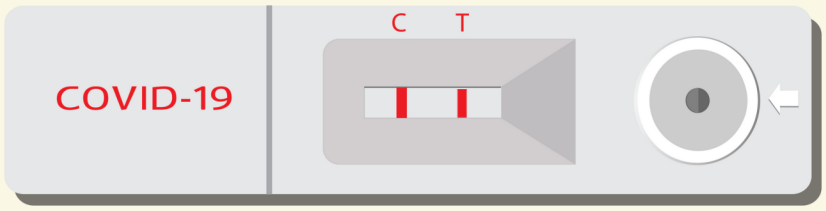
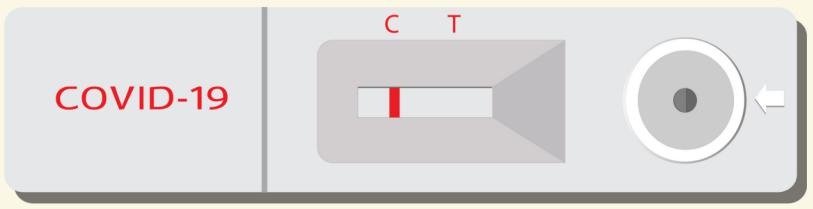
Rapid antigen tests have 2 jobs:



1. Show a true positive



2. Show a true negative

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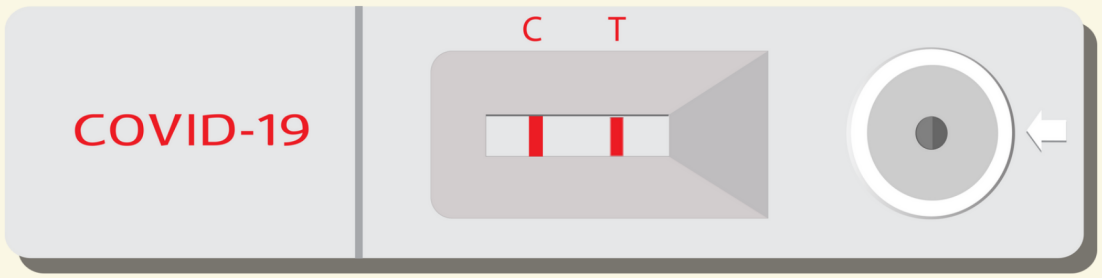
Rapid antigen tests are very good at showing true positive cases of covid.



This means if you test positive on a rapid test, you have covid.

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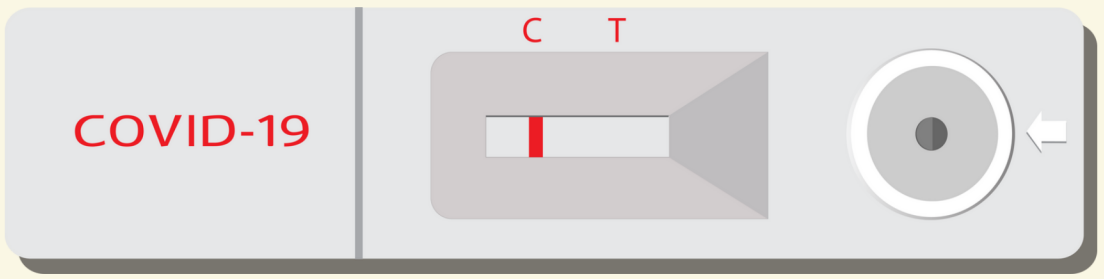
Rapid antigen tests are very bad at showing true negatives.



This means if you test negative on a rapid test, you don’t know much. You may be fine, you may have covid.

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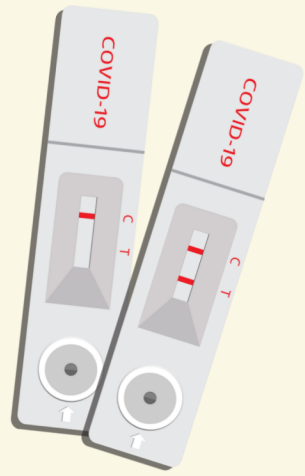

Another way to think of this is:

The chances of a **false positive** (the test showing positive but being incorrect) are very low.

The chances of a **false negative** (the test showing negative but being incorrect) are very high.

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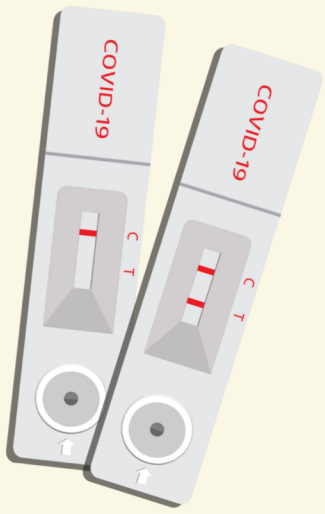

Rapid tests are still helpful at a population level because they catch some positive cases. They are worth doing for this reason.

But you shouldn’t be fully relying on a negative result. It’s better to repeat the test for multiple days or seek a PCR test through a clinic.

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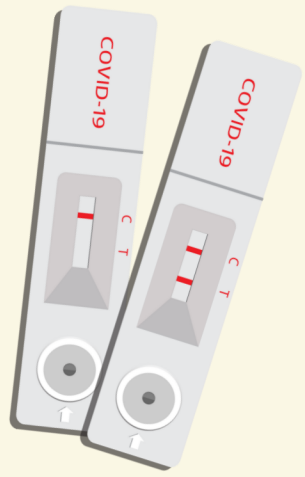

Data and Citations:

Rapid test **positives** are on average 99% reliable. This is excellent.

Rapid test **negatives** are historically only 69% reliable. **With current variants, their reliability can drop to 27%.** For perspective, this means you're better off flipping a coin. Yikes.

Clebak et. al., "Accuracy of Point-of-Care Rapid Antigen Tests for Diagnosis of COVID-19" *Am Fam Physician* (2023) 107:4.

Venekamp et al., "Diagnostic accuracy of SARS-CoV-2 rapid antigen self-tests in asymptomatic individuals in the omicron period," Clinical Microbiology and Infection (2023) 29:3.