



COVID-19 COMMUNITY MESSAGE

*From Dr. David McEachin
Chief Medical Officer, Southwell*

We know many of you have questions about COVID-19, as there are many people who have tested positive recently because of the Omicron variant. We hope the information below will help.

I have symptoms that I think might be COVID. Do I need a test?

If you have symptoms, you should get tested. Home test kits can be purchased at retail pharmacies in our area. Testing is available through Express Care at the Southwell Clinic in Tifton and the Southwell clinic in Adel. Testing may also be available through your primary care office or local public health department. Visit mysouthwell.com/covid-19 for a full list of our clinics who offer testing. Please do not go to the emergency room only to get a COVID-19 test.

What is the difference between an “antigen” test and “PCR” test?

Antigen tests detect actual particles or fragments of the COVID-19 virus. Over the counter at home tests are antigen tests. PCR tests detect the RNA (genetic material) of the COVID-19 virus. PCR testing involves the use of sophisticated laboratory equipment, and thus can only be done in a medical laboratory and not at home. Both are sufficiently accurate to reliably detect COVID-19.

What is the difference between isolation and quarantine?

Isolation is for people who have tested positive for COVID-19. Quarantine is for people who have been exposed to someone with COVID-19. The CDC has more information regarding isolation and quarantine here: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/quarantine-isolation.html>

I have been in close contact with someone who has COVID. What does this mean?

“Close contact” refers to time you spent directly with an infected person. This means you were within 6 feet of an infected person for a total of 15 minutes or more within a 24-hour period.

The 15 minutes do not need to be at the same time. For example, three separate 5-minute exposures over the course of a day would total a 15-minute exposure. If you were in close contact with an infected person, you should be notified either by the person, by the school, or by the health department, though community contact tracing efforts have recently been reduced.

I tested negative after an exposure. What should I do?

If you tested negative with a home test, follow the current guidelines related to quarantine and other testing. If you develop symptoms, you should test again. If a home test is negative and you have symptoms, public health experts recommend getting a PCR test or testing yourself again with a home test after a few days.

I tested positive at home. Do I need to get a PCR test?

If you use a home testing kit and test positive, you have COVID-19. You do not need a PCR test for confirmation. You should start home isolation immediately and notify your close contacts of your positive test.

Am I at high risk for severe COVID-19?

High-risk conditions for severe COVID-19 include undergoing treatment for cancer, currently taking medications for transplant, or taking immunosuppressant medications for other conditions. Other high-risk conditions, including having chronic lung, kidney, or liver disease; diabetes; HIV; obesity; and age 65 years or older, may pre-dispose you to worse symptoms from COVID-19 or influenza.

I tested positive. I'm not at high risk for severe disease. I'm worried about my symptoms. What should I do?

Mild symptoms – Stay home and isolate

Mild symptoms are a temperature below 100.4 degrees (below 102.4 degrees for children older than 3 months), aches and pains, or a mild cough. If you have these symptoms, stay at home and isolate. Rest, drink plenty of fluids, and monitor your symptoms. Hopefully you will start feeling better within a few days. You do not need to contact your doctor to let them know you have COVID.

Moderate symptoms – Call your care provider

If you have moderate symptoms like a fever higher than 100.4 degrees, significant coughing, or shortness of breath, contact your primary care provider's office. If you are receiving cancer treatment, please call your oncologist's office.

For children ages 3 months and older who are not immunocompromised, a high fever is greater than 102.4 degrees. If your child has a fever, significant coughing or shortness of breath, you should call their primary care provider's office. You should also call if they are sleepier, if they have not gone to the bathroom in more than 10 hours (if 3 years or older) or more than 8 hours (if younger than 3 years old). Your child's doctor can recommend next steps.

If you do not have a primary care provider, you should consider being seen at Express Care at the Southwell Clinic in Tifton, or at Southwell Medical Adel Primary Care in Adel.

Severe Symptoms – Emergency

Go to the Emergency Department if you have severe symptoms such as:

- Severe trouble breathing
- Persistent pain or pressure in the chest
- New confusion or dizziness
- Inability to wake or stay awake
- Pale, gray, or blue-colored skin, lips, or nail beds, depending on skin tone

If you cannot get to the emergency department, call 9-1-1.

I tested positive and I'm at high risk for severe disease. I am worried about my symptoms. What should I do?

Call your primary care provider's office. You may be eligible for outpatient COVID treatment, such as monoclonal antibody therapy. The supply of these therapies is extremely limited, and specific criteria must be met to qualify for them. The supply of monoclonal antibody therapy is regulated by state and federal authorities. We receive these medications on an allocated basis.

Your primary care provider can help determine if you qualify for monoclonal antibody therapy. High-risk conditions include undergoing treatment for cancer, currently taking medications for transplant, or taking immunosuppressant medications for other conditions. Other high-risk conditions, including having chronic lung, kidney, or liver disease; diabetes; HIV; obesity; and age 65 years or older, may pre-dispose you to worse symptoms from COVID-19 or influenza.

Also, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration has issued emergency use authorizations (EUAs) for Pfizer's Paxlovid (nirmatrelvir tablets and ritonavir tablets) and Merck's molnupiravir. These are pills that can be used to treat mild-to-moderate COVID-19. Paxlovid is available for adults and children 12 years of age and older weighing at least 40 kilograms. Molnupiravir is for adults only. Both are available by prescription only for patients who are at high risk for severe COVID-19. Both should be started as soon as possible after the diagnosis of COVID-19 and within five days of the start of symptoms. Limited quantities of these medications may be available. Again, your primary care provider can help determine if their use is appropriate in your situation.

Please note that the flu is now spreading in our community too. If you have a negative COVID test but have moderate symptoms, including fever and body aches, contact your primary care provider's office. They may test you for the flu or give you a medication for the flu, especially if you are in one of the high-risk groups listed above.

Please continue to take precautions to keep yourself and others safe. Remember that social distancing and avoiding crowds remains important, especially if you are at high risk for severe COVID. Because of the rapidly changing nature of the pandemic, the information discussed above is subject to change as new information becomes available, and as guidelines from the CDC evolve.

Sincerely,

David McEachin, MD
Chief Medical Officer
Southwell