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Antibody study shows coronavirus spread wider in Riverside County

Wearing a face covering will slow the spread from asymptomatic carriers

Results of a COVID-19 antibody testing study indicate the virus may have infected more than 100,000 Riverside County residents. This finding underscores the need to wear face coverings as people may have the virus without any symptoms, then easily spread it to others when not wearing a mask or keeping six feet of distance.

The randomized study, the results of which are still being analyzed, was conducted over two weekends this month. Riverside County health officials originally planned to test 3,500 randomly selected residents to determine whether they had been exposed to coronavirus and developed COVID-19 antibodies.

Here are some preliminary results from the study:

- 1,726 individuals were tested and 101 showed they had developed antibodies for COVID-19, this is a positivity rate of 5.9 percent.
- 1,621 tested negative; Four had unclear results.
- Based on that data, it is estimated there have been between 118,000 and 175,400 infections in Riverside County.

This study describes the prevalence of COVID-19, which will be used to inform planning efforts. This study is unique in that it included both children (5 years and older) and adults. Antibodies are part of the body's defense against infections. Antibodies develop and stay in the blood even after the infection is over.

Public Health is not creating a list of participants and will not collect the individual information from the study.

“The data gleaned from the study provides important information that will help guide our efforts and direction as we move forward,” said Dr. Errin Rider, laboratory director for Riverside University Health System-Public Health. “We appreciate those who agreed to take part in the study; they have contributed to the fight against the pandemic.”

Residents could not volunteer for the study, in part, because health officials wanted a more representative sampling of the community.

“We believe the number and variety of participants shows the study successfully recruited an excellent representation of the community and accurately reflects the prevalence of the antibody in Riverside County,” said Dr. Tait Stevens, with Riverside University Health System and co-author of the study.

As a reminder, the medical community does not yet know the extent of the benefits of testing positive for coronavirus antibodies. For example, it is not yet known if someone can contract the virus again after testing positive for antibodies.

“We continue to learn new information about coronavirus, and this survey adds important research to the growing knowledge of COVID-19,” said Riverside County Board Chair and Fourth District Supervisor V. Manuel Perez. “We still must protect everybody out there who is susceptible to getting sick, and we should do so by wearing face coverings, physical distancing, washing our hands and avoiding gatherings.”

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