

Clinicians and Laboratories are required to report COVID-illnesses (cases) to TDH. Public health professionals contact every case of COVID-19 statewide to interview them and learn more about their illness, exposures and contacts.

Who counts as a COVID-19 case?

The Tennessee Department of Health uses [standard criteria](#) to define a case, which was developed from national guidance put out by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Only individuals who test positive for SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID, or who meet specific symptom and exposure criteria are considered COVID-19 cases.

Who counts as a confirmed case?

Anyone who has a positive confirmatory test result for the virus that causes COVID-19. The only confirmatory test for SARS-CoV-2 is a polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test, which detects the genetic material of the virus. Individuals must have a positive PCR test to be counted as a confirmed case.

The vast majority of all COVID-19 cases in Tennessee were classified as confirmed cases, meaning they had a positive PCR test.

Who counts as a probable case?

Anyone who has not had a positive confirmatory test, but 1) has a positive antigen test or 2) meets the [clinical criteria](#) of COVID-19 infection and is at high risk for having been infected with COVID-19 by another person, such as being a close contact.

The majority of probable cases have a positive antigen test. As antigen tests become more widely available, there will be an increase in probable cases in Tennessee and nationwide.

Why do we count probable cases?

Including probable cases in case counts provides a better understanding of COVID-19 illness in the community. Not every person who has COVID-19 will get tested with a confirmatory test, so including those who are tested with an antigen test or who have COVID-19 symptoms after exposure to the virus helps TDH better understand how many people in Tennessee have COVID-19. TDH reports probable cases as recommended and follows national criteria to ensure the infection is reported uniformly across the country.

How does public health respond to cases?

TDH investigates confirmed and probable cases in the same way, by interviewing the case, and identifying contacts. Cases are required to isolate during the time they are contagious so that they do not spread COVID-19. Contacts quarantine for 14 days because for 14 days they are at risk of developing COVID-19 and spreading the disease. It is possible to spread disease even though you never develop symptoms.