

Indeterminate

Have you ever waited for a Covid-19 PCR test result by email?

For me it started on Sunday:

My husband, I took the PCR test. After taking the test, I expected a negative result within 24-hours. We needed the results to continue with the travel plans we each made.

Then on Monday:

My husband's results came in.-Negative! Just as we planned. But I am waiting for my results now. We took the test only minutes apart. Be patient, I told myself. You're healthy.

On Tuesday:

My husband kissed me farewell and told me not to worry. He was off on a guys' ski trip. I continued with my busy activities for the day. Surely my negative results would come in anytime now. My plans included working with a friend in a homeless shelter's prep kitchen. Masks, gloves, and a Covid questionnaire were filled out. My temp appeared slightly above average.

"Oh, not to worry," said my friend. "You'll love meeting the team. Let's go in."

A nagging cloud of doubt hung over my head. I checked my cell phone one more time for test results. Three hours and thousands of chopped vegetables later, we departed from the kitchen. My companion pointed to another storefront as we left the workspace.

"Want to buy some amazing tamales?" We walked in, chatted with the owner, toured the kitchen, and left with some yummy tamales. Yes, masks were in place for the whole thirty minutes.

"Can't stay for lunch," I say as we enter her car, and she begins to drive. Our face masks came off. Chatting and laughing, she dropped me off at my car.

"I'm off to meet a friend in the city for coffee around noon," I said. "I also have a medical appointment in the afternoon. Gotta go."

I sat in my car and rechecked my phone for my test result info. No luck! It was easy to rationalize why I needed to continue with my planned schedule. I felt fine. A quick cup of coffee, a lot of laughs with my city friend, and then a short drive to the vast medical center in town. Another glance at emails delivered.No results yet.

The hospital routine included the screening survey temp check. With a bit of hesitancy, I continued on to radiology for the short test. I'm masked and constantly sanitizing my hands now. The hospital test is completed. I return to the car and immediately check for the highly awaited Covid test results. Nothing-no results yet. I begin to drive, but I pull over to check one more time. One-click, and I see my results. I do a double-take. I don't find the word Negative. The term I see instead is Indeterminate.

What does Indeterminate mean? What is the definition when used with Covid testing? My heart is racing, my mind is going at warp speed, wondering what I've been doing, who I've had contact with since the test on Sunday morning.

Indeterminate's definition basically means you are neither Negative nor Positive. You must retest. I needed to be tested now. Where could I do this? How much would I pay for an instant PCR result versus waiting to redo with the existing company for free?

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I drove on, knowing I had some rapid antigen tests I could use immediately at home. My travel plans for Thursday, two days away, might work as planned. I needed to know my status with Covid. Upon arriving home, I prepared and took the home test. A sigh of relief escaped my lips as the results indicated Negative. I continued to read more online about false negatives and decided to retest again 24 hours later. Two negative results should be acceptable. Again I continued to read more on false negatives. I had to decide whether to travel or not.

First thing on Wednesday:

I scheduled a PCR test for early Wednesday morning. Maybe I'd be lucky and get the results before my departure time on Thursday. I took the test and asked the health worker if the results could be returned to me as soon as possible.

She sighed and shrugged her shoulders. "Results will be emailed to you within 24-48 hours from our lab. I hope you make your flight."

The waiting game began again. I used another precious home testing kit on myself. I followed the directions carefully and ate a pint of ice cream within 9 minutes. The results came after 10 minutes. Negative! Hurrah, or was it another false negative?

What to do on Thursday:

I didn't take my early morning flight and changed to a later flight in the day. My results could come at any moment. I drove to the airport and kept checking online. I'd return home if I didn't hear. I called my out-of-town friend and updated her on my status.

She confidently said, "You're fine, you've been vaccinated, boosted, you got two negative test results, you must get on that plane. If you learn you're positive, you can stay in the guest house for five days. Now get out here to Las Vegas."

WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

Epilogue

It was a gamble to go, but I did. I had tested negative twice. I flew over, double-masked, wearing gloves and trying not to breathe. It wasn't fun. Socially distancing, stressed, and masked, I met my friend.

Finally, 7 AM on Friday:

There was the email I wanted. My PCR results came in. I dashed into the kitchen to join her for coffee.

"Negative," I said.

"Oh, you didn't have to tell me. Seeing the smile on your face said it all."

The End