How Do I Get a PCR Test in Time for My Flight?

(Courtesy of Caroline Morse Teel, SmarterTravel)

Q. I'm flying internationally and need a test taken within three days of my flight to enter my destination, as well as one to return to the U.S., and I'm nervous I won't get results in time. How do I get a PCR test in time for travel?

A. First, confirm with the airline what type of tests are accepted. Some will allow Rapid PCR tests, while others will only accept RT-PCR tests, which take longer. To reduce the chance of not getting your test result back in time to make your flight, I recommend scheduling two tests if possible, with the first test being taken as early as possible to still meet your 72 hour window.

Check with your city to see what your testing options are. Many cities and towns are still offering free public COVID-19 tests. **CVS**, **Walgreens**, and **Rite Aid** also provide COVID-19 tests. Call the location you're considering getting tested at to see what their current turnaround time is for results to make sure you'll be able to get them back in time. **Passport Health** (which has locations around the country) is another good option, as they focus on COVID-19 tests for airline passengers.

Also see if your airline or airport offers COVID-19 testing, as these are much more likely to get you the results in the timeframe that you need to fly.

If you're willing to pay, **The COVID Consultants** (an at-home testing service) will get you results in 24 hours.

For your return trip, check with your hotel to see if they offer COVID-19 testing or have partnered with a testing location. If you're unable to find a good option, the CDC recently changed the rules around COVID-19 testing for international flights returning to the U.S. and now allows the use of at-home COVID-19 tests that meet **specific criteria**. You could pack a test that meets those rules, like **this one available through eMed**, take it virtually, and get your results instantly.