

It has been reported¹ that coronavirus test results at the CDC and in Pennsylvania, Texas, Georgia, and Vermont

conflate the outcomes of

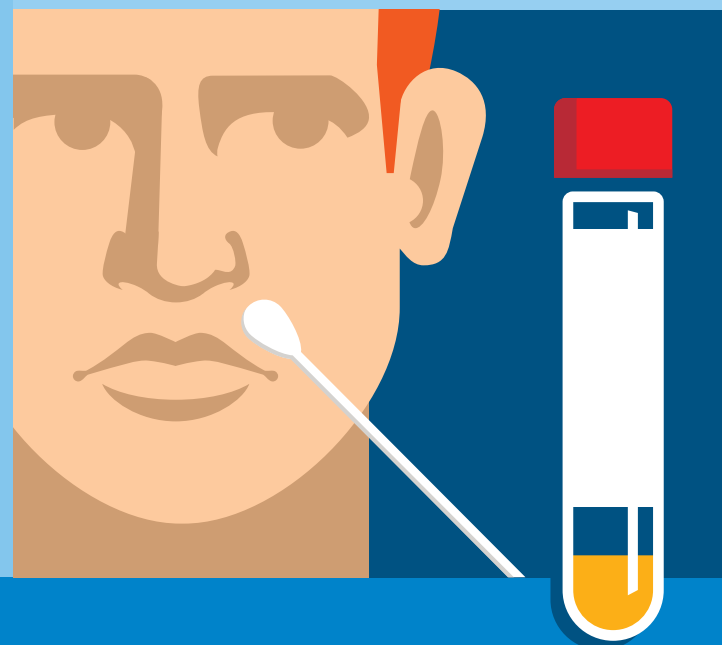
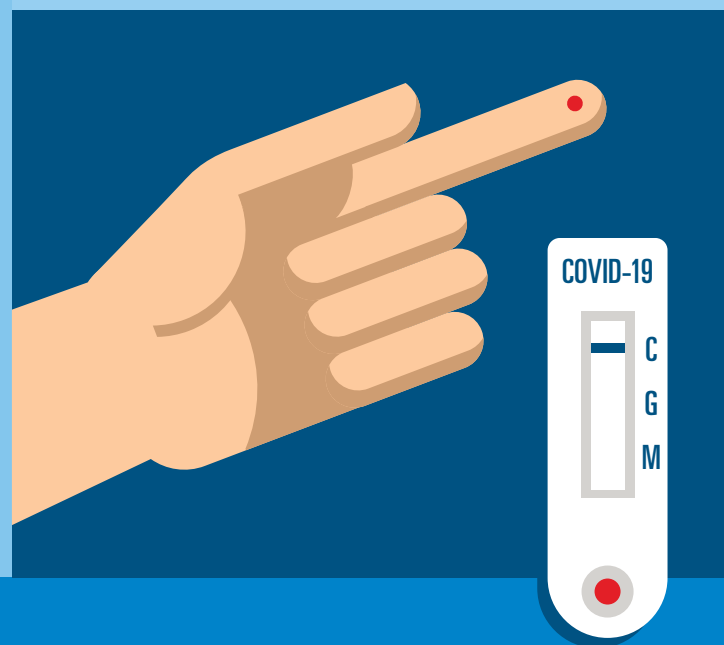
antibody tests*

*indicate whether an individual has ever been infected with the coronavirus

and

viral tests⁺

⁺inform whether or not an individual currently has coronavirus



Conflation (n.) – the merging of two or more sets of information into one, often in error.

To illustrate this, imagine a school that needs to measure its first grade students' ability to read.

There are 50 students in first grade.



The school finds that **40** first graders (i.e., **80%**) know how to read at the end of first grade.

But what they really need to know is:

15 students **already knew** how to read at the start of the school year.

25 students **actively learned** to read during the school year.

In order to assess results and improve tactics, **the school needs to isolate and act on the second data point**—that 25 students, or 50% of first graders—actively learned to read over the period in question.

Meanwhile, the first data point—80% of first graders can read—is useful information, **but on its own, would provide no reliable basis for curriculum assessment and decision-making.**

Likewise, in tracking critical coronavirus metrics—such as community spread and active cases—governors, mayors, business leaders, and others making impactful decisions regarding reopening and getting back to work cannot rely on conflated numbers.

¹ <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2020/05/cdc-and-states-are-misreporting-covid-19-test-data-pennsylvania-georgia-texas/611935/>