What is the most appropriate test to diagnose COVID-19 in an individual presenting with suggestive symptoms?

What the research says
Diagnostic testing for COVID-19 includes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clinical situation</th>
<th>Appropriate test</th>
<th>Testing for</th>
<th>Sensitivity (to identify disease)</th>
<th>Specificity (to identify no disease)</th>
<th>Clinical sample</th>
<th>Time to result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Symptomatic individual</td>
<td>Laboratory-based DNA amplification</td>
<td>Presence of viral RNA</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Nasopharyngeal/oropharyngeal swab</td>
<td>15 minutes to &gt;2 days*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Laboratory-based antigen testing</td>
<td>Presence of viral antigens</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Nasopharyngeal/oropharyngeal swab</td>
<td>15 minutes to &gt;2 days*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lateral flow (point-of-care) test</td>
<td>Presence of viral antigens</td>
<td>Low to moderate**</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Nasopharyngeal/oropharyngeal swab or finger prick blood sample</td>
<td>15–30 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Dependent on local laboratory capacity

**Dependent on factors such as how long somebody has been infected

Antibody testing can be used to indicate past infection, but is not an indicator of current infection.
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**What this means for your clinical practice**

- Confirmation of a suspected diagnosis of COVID-19 infection requires a positive laboratory-based DNA- or antigen-based test. Where laboratory testing is not an option, point-of-care testing can be utilised using a lateral flow test although there is a higher risk of a false negative result.

**Useful links and supporting references**


