Differences between PCR vs. Antigen Testing

PCR TESTING
Characteristics:
- PCR stands for Polymerase Chain Reaction
- Detects: viral genetic information
- Good sensitivity: amplifies RNA and able to detect small traces

When to use:
- Asymptomatic
- Early infection (1-2 days before or after symptoms)
- Suspected or known exposure
- Meets documentation requirements (travel, school, doctor’s visit, work)

ANTIGEN TESTING
Characteristics:
- Detects: coronavirus protein spikes
- Higher sensitivity: if positive, likelihood of positive is high (83%)
- Lower sensitivity: requires larger amounts of virus to detect

When to use:
- Symptomatic
- Test on Day 5 to determine when to end isolation
- Positive: continue isolating until after 10 days of exposure
- Negative: no longer infectious (end of isolation period)