Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19): General Guidance and Testing Information for Nebraskans

Background:

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a respiratory disease caused by a new virus strain that can spread from person to person, causing severe illness including pneumonia in some people.

Symptoms can appear 2 to 14 days after exposure to the virus. The most common symptoms reported are:

Fever

Cough

Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing

Note to the Public: **Public health officials, health care providers, and laboratories are working daily to increase our capacity to test more people for COVID-19. Currently, testing supplies are limited, just like some supplies at local stores and online. Local, state, and federal partners are working to expand testing supplies and the ability to test people experiencing symptoms as quickly as possible. While we work to increase supplies and testing, we are screening people to test those who have the highest likelihood of being exposed to or having COVID-19. As we are able to test more people, we'll provide additional information on where Nebraskans can receive testing. The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) will be updating our website to include the most up-to-date information at www.dhhs.ne.gov/coronavirus.**

Purpose of Guidance:

To help you as quickly as possible, this document is intended to provide information on testing capacity, how to get tested, and what to expect before and after testing.

Could I have COVID-19?

The most common symptoms of COVID-19 are fever, cough, and shortness of breath. If you have any of these symptoms, but have NOT been around anyone who you know has COVID-19 or have NOT recently traveled to an area with community spread, the likelihood that you have COVID-19 is fairly low. Other respiratory illnesses, like flu, in Nebraska actively circulating have similar symptoms. Health care providers will likely conduct testing to rule out common illnesses first before testing for COVID-19. At this time, we are aware that there is community transmission of COVID-19 in Nebraska, specifically in Omaha. We continue to be vigilant in monitoring cases and we are committed to slowing down the spread and increasing testing capacity as quickly as possible.

Community transmission (i.e. where we cannot identify a direct link to a case) triggers for closure by community size or region:

- For Omaha: 2 cases of community transmission
- For Lincoln: 1-2 cases of community transmission
- For other Nebraska communities: 1 case of community transmission

What should I do if I have symptoms?

- **If you are sick, please stay home except to get medical care. Separate yourself as soon as possible from other people and animals in your home. This includes staying in a specific room away from others and using a separate bathroom, if available.**
  Restricting your contact with animals is to protect the other people in your house from getting sick. If you do need to care for an animal, wash your hands before and after you interact with pets and wear a facemask, when possible.

- Call ahead before going to a health care provider, urgent care, clinic, or emergency department. This will help the healthcare provider take steps to keep other people from getting infected or exposed.
  When calling be prepared to tell your provider the following information:
  - That you are experiencing symptoms, how long you have had symptoms and describe the symptoms you are experiencing.
  - If you have been in contact with someone diagnosed with COVID-19.
  - Whether you have recently traveled (within the last 14 days) – this can be either international travel or travel within the U.S., the dates you traveled, and where you have been.

Your healthcare provider will give you medical advice and help to determine if you need to be tested.

Healthcare providers will be prioritizing testing for people with signs and symptoms compatible with COVID-19 and are in one of these groups: hospitalized patients, individuals at higher risk for severe illness like older adults and those with chronic medical conditions, healthcare workers, or those with connections to current cases, community transmission including travel within the last 14 days to one of these areas.

Please be aware that not all clinics or providers have the collection kits and ability to test you. If your health care provider is NOT able to provide testing but advises that you need to be tested or you do not have a provider, you may refer to the healthcare network list at www.dhhs.ne.gov/coronavirus. A health care provider must provide you with orders to receive a test as a lab cannot not see walk-in patients.

How do I keep from spreading my illness to my family and other people in my community? Please follow this guidance both before testing and while waiting for test results.

- **Stay home if you are sick and avoid close contact with others.**
- Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water is not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Wear a facemask when you are around other people or pets and before you enter a healthcare provider's office. If you cannot wear a facemask, stay separated from others (separate rooms) or have them wear a facemask if they enter your room.

- Avoid sharing personal household items. You should not share dishes, cups, eating utensils, towels, or bedding. After using these items, they should be washed thoroughly with soap and water. Use paper products for food if possible and dispose of them after each use.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze then throw the tissue in the trash immediately.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces. These objects or surfaces include counters, tabletops, doorknobs, toilets, faucets, phones, keyboards, tablets, remotes, bedside tables. Use household cleaning sprays or wipes, following the directions on the package.
- Monitor your symptoms. If your illness worsens (e.g. difficulty breathing) call your healthcare provider and describe your symptoms. Follow their instructions before going to the facility.
  If you have a medical emergency, call 911 and notify dispatch personnel that you have symptoms consistent with COVID-19. If possible, put on a facemask before emergency medical services arrive.

What should I do if I test Negative for COVID-19?

Follow the guidance listed in "How do I keep from spreading my illness to my family and other people in my community?" Even though you had a negative result for COVID-19, you still likely have another type of infection causing your symptoms (such as the flu). This guidance is to protect others from getting sick from respiratory and other illness.

What should I do if I test Positive for COVID-19?

- Stay home and isolate yourself from others. Follow the guidance listed in "How do I keep from spreading my illness to my family and other people in my community?"
- Your local health department will be in contact with you to identify whom you have been in contact with recently. Cooperating and working with them is extremely important and will help protect your loved ones and others, your community from further spread.
- Your local health department will provide you will information on how to protect yourself and others, as well as when it is OK to stop self-isolating.

Understanding terms:

Self-monitor: Monitor yourself for either the development of symptoms or track the progression of your symptoms. You will be asked to check for symptoms twice daily (e.g. 8 am and 8 pm). Keeping track of your symptoms (by documenting them) will be extremely important to ensuring quick access to medical care if you do have COVID-19 and will help in determining when quarantine or isolation may end.

Self-quarantine: Before you have symptoms, but have been exposed to a person with or suspected to have COVID-19, you will be asked to separate and minimize your contact with others.

Self-isolate: After you have symptoms and have tested positive for COVID-19, you will be asked to separate and minimize your contact with others.

Nebraska also has an information line available for questions and general information.

Call (402) 552-6645. The line is open 8AM - 8PM CST - 7 Days a Week.