

NURSING HOME TESTING PLAN – FALL 2020

This Nursing Home Testing Plan is intended to be used by nursing homes for COVID-19 testing of both staff and residents. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) issued guidance on August 26, 2020, to require nursing homes to continue COVID-19 testing under criteria based on the county positivity rate. The continued testing is being required as an additional mitigation effort to contain the spread of COVID-19.

Nursing homes can meet the testing requirements through the use of point-of-care (POC) diagnostic testing devices, other antigen testing methods approved by the federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA), or through an arrangement with an offsite laboratory. The State of Nebraska is offering COVID-19 testing services through Test Nebraska to all nursing homes and will continue to provide test kits, PPE for persons performing the testing, and laboratory processing through CHI St. Elizabeth Lab at the State’s expense. A nursing home may choose to use another testing service; however, the cost of using that testing service must be paid by the nursing home.

When prioritizing individuals to be tested, facilities should prioritize individuals with signs and symptoms of COVID-19 first, then perform testing triggered by an outbreak (as specified below in Table 1).

Table 1 – Nursing Home COVID-19 Testing Summary		
Testing Trigger	Staff	Residents
Symptomatic individual identified	Staff with signs and symptoms must be tested	Residents with signs and symptoms must be tested
Outbreak (Any new case arises in facility)	Test all staff that previously tested negative until no new cases are identified*	Test all residents that previously tested negative until no new cases are identified*
Routine testing	According to Nursing Home COVID-19 Routine Testing Table (see table below)	Not recommended, unless the resident leaves the facility routinely

*For outbreak testing, all staff and residents should be tested, and all staff and residents that tested negative should be retested every 3 days to 7 days until testing identifies no new cases of COVID-19 infection among staff or residents for a period of at least 14 days since the most recent positive result.

CMS guidance in QSO-20-38-NH which was issued on August 26, 2020, indicates that if the 48-hour turnaround time cannot be met due to testing supply shortages, limited access or inability of laboratories to process tests within 48 hours, the facility should have documentation of its efforts to obtain quick turnaround test results with the identified laboratory or laboratories and contact with the local and state health departments.

The volume of COVID-19 testing currently being done in Nebraska combined with the new testing required by CMS for nursing homes exceeds the capacity of CHI St. Elizabeth Lab to provide results within 48 hours. The state of Nebraska would like to continue to support the long term care facilities but is unable to support to the extent of the CMS guidelines. Table 2 below shows the testing frequency that the state is able to support utilizing Test Nebraska. Supplies will be provided to those in need for this frequency of testing only.

Table 2 – Nebraska Nursing Home COVID-19 Routine Test Nebraska Testing		
Community COVID-19 Activity	County Positivity Rate in the Past Week	Minimum Testing Frequency
Low	< 5% (+)	Once a Month
Medium	5-10% (+)	Once Every Other Week*
High	> 10% (+)	Once a Week*

Although DHHS is offering Test Nebraska as an option for modified routine testing, nursing facilities are still required to try to meet the CMS’ more frequent testing requirement and document appropriately, if unable.

DHHS is committed to working with nursing homes to support COVID-19 testing efforts. We understand the significant impact the testing requirements have on facilities, and we will continue to provide assistance by sharing new information as it becomes available and by responding to questions. We will send you a letter every other week notifying you of availability/non-availability specifically for NPHL and Test Nebraska labs to help aid your documentation needs.

Testing Information

Antigen Testing

- CMS has designated specific nursing homes in Nebraska to receive POC testing equipment and testing supplies to conduct antigen diagnostic testing for COVID-19.
- CMS has a website for COVID-19 Nursing Home Data which includes a number of other resources (see link below). Under the heading “Supporting COVID-19 Testing”, the last link in that paragraph is where you can access the most up-to-date Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) pertaining to COVID-19 testing in nursing homes, including information on the POC testing equipment.

<https://data.cms.gov/stories/s/bkwz-xpvq>

- Any molecular or antigen testing method approved by the FDA is allowable for meeting the CMS and State of Nebraska testing requirements.
- Follow manufacturers guidelines and training when using POC antigen testing equipment (i.e. BD, Quidel, AbbottBinaxNOW)

Training

- It is **IMPERATIVE** to have the proper training **PRIOR** to starting any testing.
 - Processes differ between testing platforms and need to be strictly adhered to.
 - Competency should be documented per facility policy and procedures.
- CMS has provided training materials and online training resources on the POC antigen testing to the nursing homes that receive the POC testing equipment.

- POC testing platforms manufacturers' training is located at:
 - BD: <https://www.bdveritor.com/> click on “Long Term Care Providers – Get Started Here” and then click on “Training”
 - Quidel: <https://togetheragain.quidel.com/> click on “Training” at the top of the page
 - AbbottBinaxNOW: <https://www.globalpointofcare.abbott/en/support/product-installation-training/navica-brand/navica-binaxnow-ag-training.html>
- For additional questions regarding POC Antigen testing, please contact Karen Stiles at NPHL

Karen Stiles, SM(ASCP)
 State Training Coordinator
 Nebraska Public Health Laboratory
kstiles@unmc.edu
 Office Phone: 402-559-3590
 Pager: 402-888-0128
 Cell Phone: 402-598-2348
- Test Nebraska training materiel is located on the DHHS website at: <http://dhhs.ne.gov/Pages/Post-acute-and-Other-Facilities.aspx>
- For additional questions regarding Test Nebraska testing process, please contact Amanda Borecky, amanda.borecky@gmail.com, cell 402-304-5084 OR Angie Ling, angela.ling@nebraska.gov, cell 402-499-6822
- The DHHS Incident Command team is available to do 1:1 training or virtual check-ins, if desired.
 - Please contact Z. Winfrey office: 402-471-1993 cell: 402-560-1679

Testing Supplies

Nursing Homes Using Antigen Testing

- CMS is providing a supply of test kits for the POC antigen testing equipment.
- The federal government is also providing the AbbottBinaxNOW platform.
- Additional test kits after the initial shipment will not be provided by CMS.
- Nursing homes will be responsible for procuring their own test kits directly from the manufacturer or a medical device distributor at the expense of the nursing home.

Nursing Homes Using PCR for Outbreak or Routine Testing

- DHHS will continue to provide testing supplies at no cost to nursing homes for PCR testing of staff and residents, for both outbreak and modified routine testing.
- Testing supplies include Test Nebraska test kits and PPE for persons performing the testing.
- Test Nebraska supplies will continue to be coordinated through the local health departments for ongoing testing and outbreaks.
- The nursing home is responsible for the cost of packaging and shipping to the CHI St. Elizabeth Lab.

Nursing Homes Needing Confirmatory PCR Testing for Antigen Tests

- In certain situations, confirmatory testing might be indicated for nursing homes using antigen testing. See this flow chart for more information: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/hcp/nursing-home-testing-algorithm-508.pdf>
- Confirmatory testing can be completed at NPHL after consultation with ICAP. Testing supplies and courier services will be coordinated through NPHL. Additional guidance from ICAP will be forthcoming.
- Confirmatory testing should be considered for symptomatic residents or staff when the antigen test result is negative.
- Confirmatory testing should be considered for asymptomatic residents or staff when the antigen test result is positive.

Process

- Nebraska is requiring all nursing homes to use the **CMS-calculated** county positivity rates so that testing is being done consistently.
- CMS-calculated county positivity rates are available at the following link. In the paragraph on COVID-19 Testing, there is a link to where the county positivity rates are posted.
<https://data.cms.gov/stories/s/COVID-19-Nursing-Home-Data/bkwz-xpvg>
 - Facilities are expected to monitor the county positivity rate every 1st and 3rd Monday and adjust staff testing according to CMS guidelines.
 - POC equipment should be used first and continuously until the nursing home is out of supplies or unable to acquire supplies.
 - You are encouraged to work with the LHD and contracted Test Nebraska sites in your local area to potentially utilize couriers already in place.
 - If you are utilizing Test Nebraska supplies, you will need to drop off on your specified date to the lab. The link is listed below “**LTC Lab Calendar**”. This will ensure we do NOT collapse the testing platform for the state.
<http://dhhs.ne.gov/Pages/Post-acute-and-Other-Facilities.aspx>

Reporting

- Continue to submit reports to NHSN as previously directed.
- Instructions for reporting antigen test results to DHHS are included in the “**Submission of Laboratory Test Results to DHHS Using CSV or Excel Data Format**” document at the link below:
<http://dhhs.ne.gov/Pages/Post-acute-and-Other-Facilities.aspx>
 - All tests sent to a private laboratory are reported to DHHS by that laboratory and do not need to be reported to DHHS by the facility.