Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19): Health Care Providers, Clinics, and Facilities Testing Information

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 and Providers: 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:

This document is intended to provide information for health care providers to help answer questions from patients about testing and capacity, and what to expect before and after testing.

Could my patient have COVID-19?

The most common symptoms of COVID-19 are fever, cough, and shortness of breath. If a patient has these symptoms, but has NOT been around anyone who has COVID-19 or has NOT recently traveled to an area with community spread, the likelihood of COVID-19 is fairly low. Other respiratory illnesses and strep throat are actively circulating in Nebraska with similar symptoms. COVID-19 infection rarely seems to cause a runny nose, sneezing, or sore throat (these symptoms have been observed in only about 5% of patients). Sore throat, sneezing, and stuffy nose are most often signs of a cold.

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.

Patients should be asked:

- What symptoms they are experiencing and how long they have had symptoms.
- If they have been in contact with anyone suspected to have or diagnosed with COVID-19.
- If they have recently traveled (within the last 14 days) – this can be either international travel or travel within the U.S., the dates they traveled, and where they have been. As the areas with high levels of community transmission are constantly changing, please refer to this CDC link for an updated list at https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers. The U.S. areas with higher levels of community transmission at present are Washington, California and New York City.

How can I get a patient tested for COVID-19?

NOTE: Testing supplies, lab supplies, and lab test supply chains are severely stressed. Clinicians should use their judgment to determine if a patient has signs and symptoms compatible with COVID-19 and whether the patient should be tested (for recommendations visit https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/clinical-criteria.html).

- If you already work with a commercial lab for testing, reach out to them for testing supplies and how to order the test. Be aware testing results may take 3-4 days for results.
- If you do not work with a commercial lab for testing or there is a clear need for results within 24-48 hours, reach out to your local health department to request testing. You may also refer patients to providers on the healthcare network list at www.dhhs.ne.gov/coronavirus.

For long-term care facilities and other facilities suspecting a patient with COVID-19, please follow current respiratory illness processes in place to identify and track respiratory illnesses in long-term care facilities and nursing facilities, specifically. If there is a respiratory infection in a facility, DHHS wants to ensure that we are considering a variety of possible respiratory viruses to ensure the safety and overall well-being of the patients.

- First assess if the patient will require hospitalization based on their clinical stability. If they need to be transported to the hospital and you suspect COVID-a9 please inform the receiving hospital and the ambulance crew.
- The facility will need to contact their local health department immediately.
- Separate the patient from other patients as soon as possible.
- The patient(s) must be tested for influenza first.
- If the results are negative, then complete a respiratory viral panel.
- If these results are negative, the sample should be sent for COVID-19 testing.
- Please note that there may be exceptions to this protocol depending on exposure to known or presumed COVID-19 case or other circumstances that would demonstrate exposure to this virus. The local health department will work with the facility to understand more about the case and exposures.

It is crucial that patients self-quarantine and monitor their symptoms while they are waiting for their test results and if results are positive for COVID-19.

If you are able to provide testing for patients and would like to be added to our DHHS testing availability list please email alexis.trout@nebraska.gov with your complete contact information.

Consider these priorities for testing:

- Hospitalized patients who have signs and symptoms compatible with COVID-19 in order to inform decisions related to infection control.
- Other symptomatic individuals such as, older adults and individuals with chronic medical conditions and/or an immunocompromised state that may put them at higher risk for poor outcomes (e.g., diabetes, heart disease, receiving immunosuppressive medications, chronic lung disease, chronic kidney disease).
- Any persons including healthcare workers, who within 14 days of symptom onset had close contact with a suspect or laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 patient, or who have a history of travel from affected geographic areas (https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/notices#alert) within 14 days of their symptom onset.
- There are epidemiologic factors that may also help guide decisions about COVID-19 testing. Documented COVID-19 infections in a jurisdiction and known community transmission may contribute to an epidemiologic risk assessment to inform testing decisions.

What is the process for testing and receiving results?

If you used a commercial lab for testing:
- After your order is sent to the laboratory, results will be <u>sent directly to you</u>. Please do not call the local health department until you receive the results.
- If you receive **NEGATIVE** results, let the patient know.
- If you receive **POSTITIVE** results:
  - Notify the local health department immediately of the results.
  - Advise the patient of the results and to stay home and isolate themselves from others.
  - The patient's local health department will be in contact with the patient to identify who they have been in contact with recently. Cooperating and working with the health department is extremely important and will help protect their loved ones and others, their community from further spread.
  - The patient's local health department will provide them will information on how to protect themselves and others, as well as when they are able to stop self-isolating.

If you worked with the local health department:
- After your order is sent to the laboratory, results will be <u>sent directly to the local health department.</u> You will be called as soon as results are ready, please refrain from calling the lab or the local health department
- If you receive **NEGATIVE** results, let the patient know.
- If you receive **POSTITIVE** results:
  - Advise the patient of the results and to stay home and isolate themselves from others.
  - The local health department will be in contact with the patient to identify who they have been in contact with recently. Cooperating and working with the health department is extremely important and will help protect their loved ones, others and their community from further spread.
  - The patient's local health department will provide them will information on how to protect themselves and others, as well as when they are able to stop self-isolating.

Please provide patients with the following resources:

- DHHS has developed a document for patients and the general public on what to do if you think you have COVID-19, testing, and what to expect before and after testing. This document also includes how to self-monitor, self-quarantine or self-isolate. (http://dhhs.ne.gov/Documents/Guidance%20to%20Public%20and%20Testing.pdf)
- DHHS opened a coronavirus (COVID-19) information line for to get answers to general questions and share the latest information and resources to help keep Nebraskans informed. The number is (402) 552-6645; hours of operation are 8 am-8 pm CST, 7 days a week.

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.