



Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services
HEALTH ALERT NETWORK
Update



TO: Healthcare Providers, Infection Control, Labs, Hospitals, and Public Health

FROM: Thomas J. Safranek, M.D. Gary Anthonie, MD
State Epidemiologist Director of Public Health and Chief Medical Officer
PHONE: 402-471-2937 PHONE: 402-471-8566

RE: Updated Guidelines: Laboratory Testing for COVID-19

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Until recently, testing COVID-19 has only been completed at state and Federal public health laboratories. This limited testing capacity required public health authorities to prioritize high risk persons of interest (PUIs) for testing. Testing capacity is now expanding. LabCorp, Quest, ARUP, and Mayo Clinic are performing the COVID-19 test with a published turnaround time of 3-4 days. Despite the addition of the commercial labs, the testing capacity is expected to be severely stressed by sampling materials and laboratory supplies and reagents. As the risk of community transmission mounts, healthcare providers need to use their clinical judgement about who should be tested, and to be cognizant of limited test availability. Healthcare providers who order COVID-19 testing on an outpatient should recommend strict home-isolation pending test results.

LABORATORY TESTING SUPPLIES AND LABORATORY TESTING CAPACITY:

- **Order COVID-19 testing supplies and lab tests through commercial channels for patients with signs and symptoms compatible with COVID-19.** Supply chains are severely stressed. Opening that pipeline is a critical national priority. Per CDC recommendations (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/clinical-criteria.html>), 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.
 - Only one nasopharyngeal specimen is required. Please see NPHL guidelines for additional details in specimen collection (<http://www.nphl.org/>)
 - Patients with COVID-19 have fever, cough and difficulty breathing.
 - 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.
 - Note that influenza, strep throat, and other respiratory pathogens (such as the 15 tested for on the respiratory pathogen panel) are circulating and need to be considered.

- If no commercial laboratory is available or if there is a clear need for a result within 24 to 48 hours, a healthcare provider may request testing at NPHL by calling the local health department.
- **Any patient (+) for COVID-19 virus should be immediately reported to local/state public health office.**

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.

MEDICAL RECOMMENDATIONS TO CONFIRMED/SUSPECTED COVID-19 INFECTED PATIENTS:

- **Strict isolation for tested outpatients while results are pending.**
- **Stay home except to get urgent medical care** - You should eliminate all activities outside your home, except for getting urgent medical care. Do not go to work, school, or public areas. Avoid using public transportation, ride-sharing, or taxis. If you have a medical emergency and need to call 911, notify the dispatch personnel that you have, or are being evaluated for COVID-19. If possible, put on a facemask before emergency medical services arrive.
- **Separate yourself from other people** - As much as possible, you should stay in a specific room and away from other people in your home. Also, you should use a separate bathroom, if available. Do not handle pets or other animals while sick.
- **Avoid sharing personal household items** - You should not share dishes, drinking glasses, cups, eating utensils, towels, or bedding with other people or pets in your home. All used items should be washed thoroughly with soap and water.

- **Clean your hands often** - Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol covering all surfaces of your hands and rubbing them together until they feel dry. Soap and water should be used preferentially if hands are visibly dirty. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- **Cover your coughs and sneezes** - Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw used tissues in a lined trash can; immediately clean your hands.