

**Center for Policy, Planning and Evaluation
Division of Epidemiology–Disease Surveillance and Investigation**

April 21, 2020

**Health Notice for District of Columbia Health Care Providers
Updated Priorities and Procedures for Testing Patients with Suspected COVID-19**

SUMMARY

Healthcare providers in the District of Columbia may choose to pursue testing for SARS-CoV2 through DC Department of Forensic Science Public Health Laboratory (DFS PHL), commercial laboratories, or hospital-based laboratories. Starting April 21st, testing for COVID-19 through the DC Department of Forensic Science Public Health Laboratory (DFS PHL) will no longer require approval by the DC Department of Health (DC Health). Healthcare providers can directly order testing through the DFS PHL without calling DC Health for approval or obtaining a PUI ID number. Healthcare providers should continue to report positive results via the Notifiable Disease and Condition Case Report Form on the DC Health Infectious Disease website (<https://dchealth.dc.gov/service/infectious-diseases>).

- Clinicians should take into consideration the testing priorities listed in this health notice when evaluating a patient with respiratory symptoms and continue testing for other more common respiratory viruses.
- Clinicians should appropriately guide their patients on home quarantine while test results are pending
- Clinicians should be prepared to provide patients who test positive for COVID-19 with home-isolation guidelines and information for household and close contacts (**DC Health will continue to contact trace high priority groups**)

COVID-19 Testing : Updated Procedures for COVID-19 Testing through DFS PHL

After the patient has been evaluated and the determination for molecular testing for COVID-19 through DFS-PHL has been made, please follow the steps below. Please note the process for other notifiable diseases has not changed.

1. Collect specimens. Acceptable samples for testing are either:
 - Nasopharyngeal (NP) swab in viral transport media (VTM) or Universal Transport Media (UTM) OR Combined NP swab and oropharyngeal (OP) swab in VTM or UTM. Specimens should be collected using swabs with a synthetic tip, such as nylon or Dacron, and an aluminum or plastic shaft. Calcium alginate swabs and swabs with cotton tips and wooden shafts are unacceptable.
 - All specimens should be refrigerated (2-8°C) promptly after collection and couriered/shipped on cold packs within 72 hours.
 - Specimens being held for longer than 72 hours must be stored at –70°C and couriered/shipped on dry ice.

- Detailed sample submission guidelines can be found on the DC Coronavirus webpage (<https://coronavirus.dc.gov/node/1465561>).
2. Please ensure that a completed [DC DFS PHL External Chain of Custody](#) and the [DC DFS PHL Test Requisition Form](#) accompany the specimens.
 - **Please ensure all forms are completely filled out with two matching identifiers on the specimen container and paperwork**
 - Incorrectly labelled specimens or incomplete forms may lead to further delays in testing or specimen rejection
 - A PUI ID number is no longer required
 3. Once specimens are collected and the paperwork is completed, please email DFS-COVID19@dc.gov with the following information to request the courier:
 - Sample Type (NP/OP)
 - Storage condition (refrigerated or frozen)
 - Name of the facility and address
 - Point of contact (for the courier to get the sample)
 - Phone number (for the courier when they arrive)
 4. Detailed guidance on testing procedures can be found at coronavirus.dc.gov under the “Testing” tab

COVID-19 Testing: Updated Priorities in the District of Columbia

Priority 1

Ensures optimal care options for all hospitalized patients, lessen the risk of healthcare-associated infections, and maintain the integrity of the U.S. healthcare system. This includes:

- Hospitalized patients with symptoms or history of exposure to laboratory confirmed COVID-19 patient
- Healthcare facility workers with symptoms or history of exposure to laboratory confirmed COVID-19 patient

Priority 2

Ensures those at highest risk of complication of infection are rapidly identified and appropriately triaged. This includes:

- Patients in long-term care facilities with symptoms or history of exposure to laboratory confirmed COVID-19 patient
- Patients 65 years of age and older with symptoms or history of exposure to laboratory confirmed COVID-19 patient
- Patients with underlying conditions with symptoms or history of exposure to laboratory confirmed COVID-19 patient
- First responders with symptoms or history of exposure to laboratory confirmed COVID-19 patient

Priority 3

As resources allow, test individuals in the surrounding community of rapidly increasing hospital cases to decrease community spread, and ensure health of essential workers. This includes:

- Critical infrastructure workers with symptoms
- Individuals who do not meet any of the above categories with symptoms

NON-PRIORITY

- Individuals without symptoms not in Priority Groups 1 and 2

Important Infection Control and Specimen Collection Reminders

Please ensure that **appropriate infection control precautions** are in place when triaging and assessing suspected COVID-19 patients. Guidance on this can be found on the DC Health website (<https://dchealth.dc.gov/page/health-notice>).

Guidance for Patients with Pending or Positive COVID-19 Test Results

Due to the community spread of COVID-19 in DC, DC Health is now only conducting contact tracing investigations for specific situations (such as outbreaks, persons employed in occupations deemed to be at high risk of spreading COVID-19, etc.). Therefore, clinicians who order COVID-19 tests should be prepared to advise their patients on home-quarantine while test results are pending, quarantine duration when test results are negative, and home-isolation when test results are positive. Below are some current DC Health resources available to assist with this process:

- **Guidance for contacts of a person confirmed to have COVID-19 (use this for patients who have pending COVID-19 test results):**
<https://dchealth.dc.gov/node/1468481>
- **Guidance for persons who test positive for COVID-19:**
<https://dchealth.dc.gov/node/1468491>
- **Guidance for household members, intimate contacts and caregivers of persons confirmed to have COVID-19:** <https://dchealth.dc.gov/node/1468471>

The guidelines above will continue to be updated as the outbreak evolves. Please visit <https://coronavirus.dc.gov/> and the DC Health (<https://dchealth.dc.gov/page/health-notice>) and CDC websites regularly for the most current information.

Please contact DC Health regarding COVID-19 at:
Phone: 202-576-1117 Fax: 202-442-8060 | Email: coronavirus@dc.gov