

Alaska Public Health Alert

Procedures for Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Testing in Alaska

March 10, 2020

Summary

The purpose of this alert is to update Alaska health care providers about new procedures and strategies for managing COVID-19 testing in Alaska given the ongoing global and national COVID-19 outbreak.

What's New for Alaska Providers

- Providers **no longer** need to call the Alaska Section of Epidemiology (SOE) to approve testing.
- Provider must fill out a [COVID-19 Report Form](#) for each patient regardless of which laboratory is performing testing.
- Updated CDC infection control guidance is available [here](#).

Testing

Patients who have a [clinically compatible illness](#) (defined as fever and cough, or shortness of breath) AND at least one of the following criteria should be considered for testing:

Patient Criteria	Preferred Laboratory*
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Had close contact to a laboratory-confirmed case of COVID-19	ASPHL
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Travelled (not airport transit) within the past 14 days to a location that has a CDC Level 2 or 3 Travel Health Notice or to a community where community transmission of COVID-19 is occurring†	ASPHL
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hospitalized	ASPHL
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lives in a long-term care facility	ASPHL
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Health care worker (negative influenza test)	ASPHL
<i>Individuals not meeting any of the above criteria:</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A person with mild illness who is at increased risk for serious illness from COVID-19, for example, person older than 60 years, chronic medical conditions	Commercial laboratory
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Other patients as determined by clinical discretion	Commercial laboratory

*ASPHL laboratory supplies are limited, so please follow the preferred laboratory guidance closely.

†This situation is rapidly changing; please refer to [CDC](#), [WHO](#), and other available resources to make this determination.

Currently there is widespread circulation of influenza, cold viruses, and RSV in Alaska. *Patients who are less likely to have had COVID-19 exposure for whom an alternate diagnosis has been confirmed may not need to be tested for COVID-19.*

Specimen Collection Information for ASPHL

- Specimen collection details are on page 23 of the [Laboratory Test Directory](#).
- Instructions for obtaining a nasopharyngeal swab are available on [page 95](#) of the directory.
- Specimens are batched and run daily; current turnaround time is 1–3 days, 7 days a week (this may vary depending on specimen volume and resources).
- Certain specimens may be run on a STAT basis, in consultation with SOE.

Reporting and Questions

Health care providers may continue to contact the Alaska Section of Epidemiology (SOE) at 907-269-8000, or 800-478-0084 after-hours with any outstanding questions.

This is a rapidly evolving situation, please check the SOE's [COVID-19 website](#) often for updates. Additional guidance is available on [CDC's COVID-19 website](#).