Alaska Public Health Alert

Updated Procedures for Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Testing in Alaska
March 13, 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. Alaska’s first confirmed case of COVID-19 was identified on March 12; this was a travel-associated case, not a case of community-acquired infection.

What’s New for Alaska Providers
• ONLY nasopharyngeal swabs are needed for testing (oropharyngeal swabs are optional).
• Please refer to the Alaska Section of Public Health Laboratories homepage for details regarding laboratory testing specifics.
• As of Mar. 10, 2020, health care providers no longer need to call the Alaska Section of Epidemiology (SOE) to approve testing.
  o Call SOE at 907-269-8000 or 800-478-0084 (after-hours) to consult about a specific patient or situation, especially those patients who will not be able to isolate in their own homes (e.g., homeless persons or travelers from out of town).
  o Provider must fill out a COVID-19 Report Form for each patient, regardless of which laboratory is performing testing.

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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Patient Criteria</th>
<th>Preferred Laboratory</th>
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<tr>
<td>Had close contact to a laboratory-confirmed case of COVID-19</td>
<td>ASPHL*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Has a history of travel to (not airport transit) or residence in a community where local transmission of COVID-19 is occurring within the past 14 days†</td>
<td>ASPHL*</td>
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<td>Hospitalized</td>
<td>Commercial laboratory</td>
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<td>Lives in a long-term care facility</td>
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<td>Health care worker (negative influenza test)</td>
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Individuals not meeting any of the above criteria:

| 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 |
| Any other patient as determined by clinical discretion | |

*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 online 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 may not need to be tested for COVID-19 if an alternate diagnosis has been confirmed.

Specimen Collection Information for ASPHL
• Details on page 23 of the Laboratory Test Directory; instructions for obtaining a NP swab on page 95.
• Specimens are batched current turnaround time is 1–3 days.
• Certain specimens may be run on a STAT basis, in consultation with SOE.

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.