



Larry Hogan, Governor · Boyd K. Rutherford, Lt. Governor · Robert R. Neall, Secretary

March 13, 2020

Dear Colleague:

The Maryland Department of Health (MDH) recognizes and appreciates that Maryland clinicians are central to the mitigation and management of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). This letter provides guidance on testing for COVID-19. It supplements information in the March 6 and March 11, 2020 clinician letters. Since those letters were distributed, COVID-19 community transmission has been documented in Maryland and the region.

In response to this important threshold, Maryland clinicians are advised of the following:

- At this time, we ask that you make every attempt to provide remote care for patients through telemedicine and/or telephonic communications.
 - Asymptomatic persons do not need to be tested.
 - Mildly symptomatic patients who are otherwise healthy can self-quarantine, monitoring temperature, and symptoms and check in with the provider as needed. These patients do not need to be tested.
 - Patients who have severe symptoms, such as difficulty breathing, should seek care immediately. Older patients and individuals who have underlying medical conditions or are immunocompromised should contact their physician early in the course of even mild illness. In most situations, those patients will need to be evaluated in an emergency department.
- Overall, since COVID-19 testing is available at commercial and some hospital labs, clinicians should send specimens to those laboratories for testing. These labs process but do not obtain specimens
- Clinicians do NOT need approval from the Maryland Department of Health or the local health department to order, collect, or submit specimens to commercial or hospital laboratories. You do NOT need to call the health department if you use a commercial or hospital lab for COVID-19 testing. You should check with these laboratories for specific information on specimen collection and packaging requirements.
- 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. You do not need to call the state or local health department about these cases.
- CDC now recommends that a nasopharyngeal (NP) swab alone is adequate. You do NOT need to collect both an NP and oropharyngeal/throat (OP) swab.

- The Maryland Department of Health is performing COVID-19 testing at the state public health laboratory for the following groups:
 - Person who had close contact with a laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 patient within 14 days of onset AND signs of infection including either fever or signs/symptoms of a lower respiratory illness
 - Person who resides in a nursing home or long-term care facility AND who has either fever or signs/symptoms of a lower respiratory illness AND who tested negative for influenza on initial workup and no alternative diagnosis
 - Hospitalized patients who have signs and symptoms compatible with COVID-19 and no alternate explanation in order to inform decisions related to infection control

For patients who fall within one of these three categories, clinicians must contact the local health department

- Based on the scientific evidence to date about how COVID-19 is transmitted, newly released infection prevention guidance from CDC, and given shortages of N95 respirators, MDH advises that collection of NP swab specimens for COVID-19 testing using contact and droplet precautions with a surgical mask is appropriate. Eye protection should always be used, as well as gowns and gloves.
- Specimen collection may be performed in an examination room with the door closed. Severely ill patients who will be transferred to a higher level of care should not be tested in an outpatient setting.
- It is critical that outpatient providers continue to ensure that any patients presenting with respiratory symptoms are immediately given a facemask for source control.
- Clinicians should advise outpatients who are being tested to go immediately home and stay isolated at home until test results are available. Additional guidance for persons at home awaiting test results is available at the following CDC website:

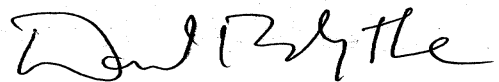
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/guidance-prevent-spread.html>

We acknowledge and appreciate that your role in the response to COVID-19 is critical. We will continue to share updates with you as important new information becomes available.

Sincerely,



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