

HEALTH ALERT NETWORK HEALTH DISTRICT 4

COVID-19 ADVISORY FOR HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS

Central District Health Announces Updated COVID-19 Testing Processes

March 6, 2020

Summary

Criteria to guide testing of patients for COVID-19 have been expanded to a wider group of symptomatic patients. See <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/hcp/clinical-criteria.html>.

Healthcare providers should use their judgment to determine if a patient has signs and symptoms compatible with COVID-19 and whether the patient should be tested. Decisions on which patients receive testing should be based on the local epidemiology of COVID-19, as well as the clinical course of illness. Most patients with confirmed COVID-19 have had fever or symptoms of acute respiratory illness (e.g., cough, difficulty breathing).

Healthcare providers are strongly encouraged to first test for other causes of respiratory illness, including influenza.

Commercial Laboratory Testing

At least two commercial laboratories will offer COVID-19 in the coming days. These tests will not require public health notification prior to testing. Positive results will be reported to public health officials, who might contact providers or patients.

IBL Test Request Process

To test specimens for COVID-19 at the Idaho Bureau of Laboratories (IBL), notify public health officials prior to specimen submission. Failure to notify public health will lead to delays in testing. Call Central District Health at (208) 327-8625 or the Division of Public Health Epidemiology Section at (208) 334-5939.

Testing at IBL is not offered for asymptomatic people.

Specimens from patients with mild respiratory symptoms and no known exposures will have standard testing priority. High priority will be given to specimens from symptomatic people who meet one or more of the following criteria:

- had close contact with a person with a confirmed COVID-19 infection
- recently traveled to an area with widespread community transmission of COVID-19
- have severe respiratory illness of no known cause
- are health care workers
- are long-term care facility residents or residents of other congregate living facilities with respiratory disease and negative influenza testing.

Turnaround time for results will be variable based on daily number of specimens received. Contact IBL at 208-334-2235 or see the IBL website (<https://statelab.idaho.gov>) for instructions on specimen collection and submission. After notifying public health, submitters can use the IBL [Clinical Test Request Form](#), select the Other option under Virology, and write in “COVID-19”.

Preferred specimens include nasopharyngeal and oropharyngeal swabs and sputum (if possible without induction) regardless of time of symptom onset. See <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/lab/guidelines-clinical-specimens.html> for additional information.

Infection Prevention Considerations

If you suspect a patient may have COVID-19, notify infection prevention staff in your facility. Patients presenting with symptoms of respiratory infection should be instructed to wear a facemask as soon as they are identified. Evaluate patients in a private room with the door closed, ideally an airborne infection isolation room. Healthcare personnel entering the room should use standard precautions, contact precautions, airborne precautions, and eye protection (e.g., goggles or a face shield). See <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/infection-control.html> for detailed infection prevention and control recommendations and updates.

Patients presenting with respiratory illness should be instructed to take steps to minimize the spread of illness in the community. Specific steps include staying home and avoiding close contact with others while ill, covering coughs and sneezes with a tissue, washing hands often, and disinfecting frequently touched surfaces.

Additional resources

- CDC COVID-19 for healthcare: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/index.html>
- Central District Health: <https://cdh.idaho.gov/dac-coronavirus.php>
- Idaho Department of Health & Welfare: <https://healthandwelfare.idaho.gov/COVID19>