

HEALTH ALERT

Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19): Updated Guidance for Testing

April 1, 2020

Update from Health Alert about testing procedures released March 20, 2020

Summary and Action Items

- On March 24, 2020, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) revised guidance for [“Evaluating and Testing Persons for COVID-19”](#) to update priorities for testing patients with suspected COVID-19 infection.
- The Ohio Department of Health (ODH) has updated testing procedures at the ODH Public Health Laboratory.
- On March 24, 2020, CDC also updated, [“Interim Guidelines for Collecting, Handling, and Testing Clinical Specimens from Persons for COVID-19”](#) to allow for self- or healthcare worker-collected nasal or nasal turbinate swab as an acceptable specimen type if nasopharyngeal (NP) swab is not possible.

Updated Criteria for COVID-19 Testing at the ODH Laboratory

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. Most patients with confirmed COVID-19 have developed fever and/or symptoms of acute respiratory illness (e.g., cough, difficulty breathing).

Priorities for testing at the ODH Laboratory include:

PRIORITY 1: To ensure optimal care options for all hospitalized patients, lessen the risk of nosocomial infections, and maintain the integrity of the healthcare system

- Hospitalized patients
- Symptomatic healthcare workers

PRIORITY 2: To ensure those who are at highest risk of complication of infection are rapidly identified and appropriately triaged

- Patients in long-term care facilities with symptoms
- First responders with symptoms
- Patients 65 years of age and older with symptoms and testing referred from a hospital, including ED
- Patients with underlying conditions with symptoms and testing referred from a hospital, including ED

Hospitals should refer the testing that meets the above criteria to a laboratory that can return results promptly, including ODH laboratory and larger laboratories with this ability that have agreed to perform testing. Clinicians considering testing of persons with possible COVID-19 through ODH lab should contact the ODH Bureau of Infectious Diseases at 614-995-5599 to coordinate; please use COVID-19 diagnostic testing authorized by the Food and Drug Administration under an Emergency Use

Authorization (EUA) through clinical laboratories for individuals not included in priorities 1 and 2 for ODH Lab testing.

Sample Collection

All testing for COVID-19 should be conducted in consultation with a healthcare provider, and only for patients demonstrating symptomatic disease. The guidance below addresses options for self-collection of specimens once a clinical determination has been made to pursue COVID-19 testing. For initial diagnostic testing for COVID-19, CDC recommends collecting and testing an upper respiratory specimen.

Nasopharyngeal (NP) specimen is the preferred choice for swab-based SARS-CoV-2 testing. When collection of an NP swab is not possible, the following are acceptable alternatives:

- An oropharyngeal (OP) specimen collected by a healthcare professional, or
- A nasal mid-turbinate (NMT) swab collected by a healthcare professional or by onsite self-collection (using a flocked tapered swab), or
- An anterior nares specimen (NS) collected by a healthcare professional or by onsite self-collection (using a round foam swab).

For NS, a single polyester swab with a plastic shaft should be used to sample both nares. NS or NMT swabs should be placed in a transport tube containing either viral transport medium, Amies transport medium, or sterile saline.

If both NP and OP swabs are collected, they should be combined in a single tube to maximize test sensitivity and limit testing resources.

CDC also recommends testing lower respiratory tract specimens, if available. For patients who develop a productive cough, sputum should be collected and tested for SARS-CoV-2. The induction of sputum is not recommended. When it is clinically indicated (e.g., those receiving invasive mechanical ventilation), a lower respiratory tract aspirate or bronchoalveolar lavage sample should be collected and tested as a lower respiratory tract specimen.

CDC guidance for collecting, handling, and testing clinical specimens from persons for COVID-19 is available [here](#).

Contact

Immediately report all confirmed cases of COVID-19 to the local health department in the jurisdiction in which the case resides. To locate a local health department, please visit <https://odhgateway.odh.ohio.gov/lhdinformationsystem/Directory/GetMyLHD>.

For general questions related to COVID-19, healthcare providers and facilities should contact their local health department. Ohio local health departments should contact the ODH Bureau of Infectious Diseases at 614-995-5599.

For testing at ODH Laboratory, contact the ODH Bureau of Infectious Diseases at 614-995-5599 and complete the ODH Microbiology Specimen Submission Form (attached) for each specimen.

Attachments

- ODHL COVID-19 Testing Procedures (UPDATED April 1, 2020)
- Sample Microbiology Specimen Submission Form