

TO: Vermont Health Care Providers and Health Care Facilities
FROM: Patsy Kelso, PhD; State Epidemiologist

Updated Guidance Regarding Testing for SARS-CoV-2

Following are three important updates related to testing for SARS-CoV-2, the etiologic agent of novel coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19):

1) **Testing for SARS-CoV-2 infection is now being recommended more broadly.** Specifically:

- When a person in a workplace or household, or someone associated with an event, tests positive for COVID-19, testing of others in attendance should be performed as soon as possible, as well as at or after day 7, in order to identify any other people with COVID-19.
- In addition, a person should be tested for COVID-19 **before and after attending a gathering** of people from more than one household.
 - **If the test is positive**, this person must isolate and follow Health Department guidance to prevent transmission to others.
 - **If the test is negative**, the negative result does not preclude future positive test results from subsequent testing. A negative test only indicates the person's status at that point in time.
- **People who often gather socially** with other people from outside their household should seek a COVID-19 test weekly.
- **College students** returning to Vermont from out-of-state colleges should quarantine and be tested on day 7 or later of quarantine after returning home.

2) According to the Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists (CSTE)'s updated case definition for COVID-19, as stated in the [September 2, 2020 Health Update](#), detection of SARS-CoV-2 ribonucleic acid (RNA) in a clinical or autopsy specimen using a molecular amplification test (PCR) is considered confirmatory laboratory evidence of SARS-CoV-2 infection. PCR testing for SARS-CoV-2 is very sensitive, and **a positive SARS-CoV-2 PCR result does not require confirmation**. A negative PCR result following an initial positive SARS-CoV-2 PCR result does not negate the initial positive SARS-CoV-2 result. In other words, an initial positive SARS-CoV-2 PCR result cannot be ignored if the patient is retested by PCR and the result is negative. **Also, an indeterminate PCR test result is not a 'presumptive positive' result.**

- 3) As stated in the [June 3, 2020 Health Update](#) and the [August 14, 2020 Health Update](#), as well as on the [Vermont Department of Health website](#), **close contacts of someone who has COVID-19 must quarantine**. The median incubation period for COVID-19 is 4-5 days, and the vast majority of cases develop symptoms by day 7. People who are in quarantine for any reason, with the exception of residents and staff of congregate care settings (including long-term care and detention facilities), and who are asymptomatic throughout the 14-day quarantine period can be tested by PCR on or after day 7. People must stay in quarantine while awaiting test results.

If the results are negative and they remain asymptomatic, they may end quarantine. Anyone who receives a negative test result on or after day 7 must continue to self-monitor for symptoms for the remainder of the 14-day incubation period. Although testing within 7 days of close contact with someone who has COVID-19 is encouraged in order to find cases earlier, testing must occur again on day 7 or later for that person to end quarantine early.

REQUESTED ACTIONS:

- **Test for SARS-CoV-2 infection as soon as possible** after a potential exposure to someone with COVID-19, and **test again on or after day 7** to identify COVID-19 cases as early as possible.
- Because a positive SARS-CoV-2 PCR result does not require confirmation, **do not re-test people who test positive by PCR for SARS-CoV-2** to 'confirm' the positive result. A negative PCR result following a positive PCR result does not invalidate the initial positive PCR result.
- **Test close contacts appropriately**. Close contacts of a person who has COVID-19 should **quarantine for 14 days**. People who remain asymptomatic may be tested by PCR **on or after day 7** to end quarantine early if the result is negative. These people must continue to self-monitor for symptoms for the remainder of the 14-day period.
- **Consider using standing orders for SARS-CoV-2 testing of asymptomatic patients** in your practice to facilitate the arrangement of testing by medical assistants and others in your office.

If you have any questions, please contact the HAN Coordinator at 802-859-5900 or vthan@vermont.gov.

HAN Message Type Definitions

Health Alert: Conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention.

Health Advisory: Provides important information for a specific incident or situation may not require immediate action.

Health Update: Provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; unlikely to require immediate action.

Info Service Message: Provides general correspondence from VDH, which is not necessarily considered to be of an emergent nature.