

**TO:** Vermont Health Care Providers and Health Care Facilities  
**FROM:** Mark Levine, MD, Commissioner of Health

**Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19): Updated Guidance for Testing in Pediatric Populations**

**Background:**

As Vermont continues to employ the Stay Home, Stay Safe strategy to limit the spread of infection with SARS-CoV-2 (the causal agent of COVID-19), the Vermont Department of Health remains committed to developing effective strategies to safely identify, test, isolate, and trace contacts of potentially infected individuals to assist with “flattening the curve” to reduce the spread of this illness.

This Health Advisory provides updated guidance to clinicians regarding testing in pediatric populations. Because of limited resources and the need to prioritize testing for those at highest risk for severe disease, the Health Department had previously recommended testing only children with moderate to severe disease. Now, with increased laboratory capacity for diagnostic testing, **health care professionals are encouraged to begin testing symptomatic children** (defined as those < 18 years of age) for whom infection with SARS-CoV-2 is a reasonable possibility, **even if symptoms are mild**. Health care professionals should continue testing symptomatic adults.

Priority for testing symptomatic children with mild to moderate disease should be given to children:

- a) of health care providers;
- b) with chronic underlying medical conditions;
- c) in congregate housing; and
- d) with exposure to a patient with COVID-19.

As always, health care professionals should apply clinical judgment in identifying symptomatic pediatric patients that qualify for diagnostic testing. However, testing of asymptomatic children for any reason, such as entry into childcare facilities, is strongly discouraged.

The decision to broaden testing in the pediatric population is based upon population containment strategies. Thus far, relatively few children in Vermont have been tested and identified as positive for COVID-19, with confirmed pediatric cases generally having mild disease. However, enhancing our understanding of the epidemiology of COVID-19 in Vermont by expanding testing in pediatric patients will further assist efforts to minimize community spread.

**Requested Actions:**

- 1) Health care providers are encouraged to begin testing symptomatic children, irrespective of severity.
- 2) Health care providers should continue to refer their patients to centralized testing sites such as local Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs), hospitals and associated test centers, rather than collecting samples at their practices, in order to conserve personal protective equipment (PPE). Exceptions to this can be made on an individual basis.
- 3) At this time, based on the capabilities of the laboratories currently performing testing on Vermont patients, nasopharyngeal (NP) specimens are still required for pediatric testing.
- 4) Send all novel coronavirus (COVID-19) specimens to the University of Vermont Medical Center Laboratory for prioritization.

If you are a hospital lab that has daily courier pickup for the University of Vermont Medical Center, include your sample in that pickup. Otherwise, send your samples to your nearest clinical laboratory for pickup as usual.

All specimens must include a [clinical test request form for COVID-19](#). Label all specimens with the patient name and the collection date. If you have questions, call UVM Medical Center Laboratory Customer Service at 800-991-2799.

Test results are reported to the hospital or clinical laboratory where the test was collected, which in turn notifies the ordering physician or other healthcare provider. Test results are sent using the fax, email or phone information provided on the clinical test requisition form. The health care provider notifies the patient of the results.

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