

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

Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19): Laboratory Testing Process Update

This Health Alert supplements the following two Health Advisories:

- March 14, 2020: COVID-19 Diagnostic Testing in Vermont
- March 6, 2020: Laboratory Testing for Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)

BACKGROUND

Due to the volume of specimens being collected, providers are going to be asked to send specimens to the University of Vermont Medical Center Laboratory instead of the Health Department Laboratory.

Due to limits in the number of specimens that can be processed within 24 hours, there will be a prioritization of specimens for turnaround time, not a prioritization of who should be tested; any health care provider who wants to test a symptomatic individual for COVID-19 may collect and submit specimens for testing.

REQUESTED ACTION –

Understand the groups prioritized for COVID-19 processing:

- Patients:
 - Hospitalized
 - Immunocompromised
 - Requiring dialysis
- Residents of non-acute care facilities
- Incarcerated individuals
- Health care workers
- Deceased individuals

Change in Sample Processing

Send all novel coronavirus (COVID-19) specimens to the University of Vermont Medical Center Laboratory for prioritization. The turnaround time for testing is 24-48 hours for priority specimens, and 3 to 4 days for non-priority specimens.

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

All specimens must include a [Clinical Test Request Form](#). Label all specimens with the patient name and the collection date. If you have questions, call 800-991-2799.

Test Kit Request System

The Health Department Laboratory has developed a COVID-19 Test Kit that can be ordered through the COVID Resource Request Form: www.surveygizmo.com/s3/5504100/COVID-Resource-Request-Form. Kits are in limited supply and distribution is prioritized to non-hospital facilities, such as primary care providers. In special circumstances – and supplies permitting – test supplies will be sent to walk-in clinics and urgent care facilities. Hospitals will be encouraged to use their own supplies.

The Health Department Laboratory will arrange for delivery of kits to providers. Requestors will receive an email with information on whether their request will be fulfilled, partially fulfilled or denied within one business day of the Health Department Laboratory receiving the request. Kits will also be distributed at additional locations throughout the state to enhance access in urgent situations Monday through Friday, 7:45 AM to 4:30 PM, but special approval and instructions will be available by contacting the Health Department Laboratory at 802-338-4724.

Which Patients Should be Tested?

Most people with mild symptoms of COVID-19 can be managed at home without testing, much as providers can empirically manage patients who might have flu. The Health Department advises against testing most people with mild fever or respiratory symptoms because:

- Presenting for testing potentially exposes the public, health care workers, and vulnerable people to COVID-19.
- We must preserve our limited personal protective equipment (PPE) and specimen collection supplies for our health care system to care for patients who will develop severe COVID-19 illness over the coming months of this pandemic.
- Confirming infection for every person does not change how most people's illness is managed.

Any person with symptoms compatible with COVID-19 who is not tested and can be managed at home (i.e. does not require hospitalization) should be instructed to self-isolate until:

- At least 7 days have passed since symptoms first appeared, **AND**
- At least 72 hours (3 days) have passed since recovery – which is defined as resolution of fever without the use of fever-reducing medications and improvement in respiratory symptoms.

Clinicians should use their judgment to determine if a patient has signs and symptoms (fever, cough, shortness of breath) compatible with COVID-19, and whether the patient should be tested. Clinicians are strongly encouraged to also test for other causes of respiratory illness, including infections such as influenza, through their routine clinical laboratories.

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.