



State of Louisiana
Louisiana Department of Health
Office of the Secretary

October 16, 2020

**ALL LOUISIANA NURSING FACILITIES
Via Electronic Transmission Only**

This letter provides an update to June 17, 2020 Louisiana Department of Health (LDH) guidance regarding SARS-CoV-2 PCR testing requirements at Nursing Facilities (NF) in Louisiana.

Nursing Facilities (NF) are residences for a vulnerable population most at risk for the novel coronavirus. When one case of COVID-19 is detected in a nursing facility, there are often other residents and staff who are infected with COVID-19 and can continue to spread the infection, even if they are asymptomatic. As of October 4, 2020, all NF in Louisiana have reported at least one COVID case among a resident or staff member in the facility, and NF residents accounted for more than 40 percent of the COVID-19 associated deaths in Louisiana. Serial viral testing of residents and staff allows for early detection of COVID-19 cases and rapid implementation of infection control measures to reduce the likelihood of transmission. Updated LDH SARS-CoV-2 testing recommendations for NF residents and staff/health care providers (HCP), including guidelines for testing frequency, the use of antigen tests and reporting to LDH are detailed below.

LDH recommendation for COVID-19 Viral Testing Frequency

LDH, in accordance with CDC guidance (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/nursing-homes-testing.html>) recommends the following SARS-CoV-2 testing strategy in NF:

1. Baseline/initial testing of all NF residents and staff/HCP.
2. Weekly repeat testing for all prior negative and untested residents *and* staff/HCP.
3. When two negative rounds among residents *and* staff/HCP collected at least seven (7) days apart in a 14-day period are achieved, resident testing may cease.
4. Continue to conduct repeat testing of staff/HCP who have tested negative previously or who have not yet been tested. . Based on CMS guidelines, (<https://data.cms.gov/stories/s/COVID-19-Nursing-Home-Data/bkwz-xpvg>), NF staff/HCP should be tested twice per week in parishes with $\geq 10\%$ positivity. Per LDH recommendations, NF staff/HCP in all other parishes should be tested weekly.

5. If either a positive staff/HCP member or a symptomatic resident are identified, then re-initiate serial testing of all prior negative and untested residents at step #2.

LDH recommendation for the use of SARS-CoV-2 antigen tests in NF

Antigen tests are most useful for diagnostic testing on symptomatic persons within the first 5-7 days of symptom onset. The utility of SARS-CoV-2 antigen testing in congregate settings is still being studied. LDH is issuing the following Interim Guidance regarding antigen testing in NF. This Interim Guidance is subject to change as more information on the clinical performance of POC antigen testing becomes known.

1. Antigen tests may be used for symptomatic residents and staff/HCP. However, all negative tests from symptomatic residents and staff should be confirmed by PCR.
2. All testing of asymptomatic residents should be performed by PCR. Per [CMS testing requirements](#), laboratories that can quickly process tests with rapid reporting of results (e.g., within 48 hours) should be utilized.
3. Antigen tests may be used for asymptomatic staff/HCP without the need to confirm a negative result by PCR. However, asymptomatic staff/HCP that test positive by antigen test should be confirmed by PCR.
4. Antigen tests may be used to test visitors. Any testing performed on visitors to NF does not obviate the need to strictly follow any and all of the CMS or LDH requirements for safe NF visitation.
 - Visitors with positive results should be excluded from visitation until they meet end of isolation criteria as advised by the CDC. Current guidance advises, for most persons with COVID-19 illness, isolation and precautions can generally be discontinued 10 days *after symptom onset*¹ and resolution of fever for at least 24 hours, without the use of fever-reducing medications, and with improvement of other symptoms. For persons who never develop symptoms, isolation and other precautions can be discontinued 10 days *after the date of their first positive test for SARS-CoV-2*. (current CDC recommendations found here: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/duration-isolation.html>)
 - Visitors testing negative should be allowed to visit maintaining the core principles of COVID-19 infection prevention.

Reporting SARS-CoV-2 Antigen test results

All facilities performing testing for COVID-19/SARS-CoV-2 are required to report all COVID-19/SARS-CoV-2 results to LDH. This includes rapid testing, point-of-care testing, antibody testing, or any other testing performed for COVID-19. Electronic laboratory reporting (ELR) in HL7 or CSV format is the preferred mechanism for reporting results. Facilities performing COVID-19 testing on-site and that do not have ELR set up to report results should contact ELR@la.gov to obtain access to the Louisiana Lab Submission Online Portal. The Louisiana Lab Submission Online Portal is a secure online survey where providers can submit all COVID-19 lab reports to the Louisiana Department of Health. The full guide for reporting via this portal can be accessed here: <https://ldh.la.gov/index.cfm/page/1993>.

Questions or concerns regarding these requirements should be directed to your Regional OPH staff.

Sincerely,

Jimmy Guidry, M.D.

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State Health Officer and Medical Director



Tara LeBlanc
Interim Medicaid Director