Health Alert Network Message 20-18: Updated Testing Criteria at State and Commercial Labs

Origination Date:	Revision Dates (list all revision dates):
March 19, 2020	

Updated Guidance for COVID-19 Testing at State and Commercial Laboratories
If you have an ambulatory patient that does not fit the COVID-19 testing criteria for the State Laboratory, please follow all testing and shipping guidance from the commercial laboratory, including specimen collection, specimen container, and submission criteria.

Testing at the State Laboratory
Only the following patients are appropriate for COVID-19 testing at the State Laboratory at this time:

- Hospitalized patients with a severe respiratory illness with no other known cause.
- Suspect outbreak of COVID-19 among associated individuals with recent onset of similar fever and lower respiratory symptoms.
- Recent fever and lower respiratory symptoms in a healthcare worker with direct contact to a laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 case.
- Suspect COVID-19 in a patient associated with a high-risk exposure setting such as a long-term care facility or a correctional facility.
- Suspect COVID-19 in a homeless patient.

Clinicians who suspect COVID-19 in a patient who fits the criteria for testing at the State Laboratory should call 1-800-256-2748 for approval. Please do not call the testing number for any patient not meeting the criteria for testing at the State Lab.

Updated Guidance for COVID-19 Testing at the State Laboratory

Specimen Container(s):

- **Viral Transport Media**
  - All commercially prepared Viral Transport Media is acceptable as long as you are using an acceptable swab.
  - You may NOT use cotton tipped swabs, calcium alginate swabs or swabs with wooden shafts, as they may contain substances that inactivate some viruses and inhibit PCR testing.

- **In-House Prepared Viral Transport Media**
  - In-House prepared Viral Transport Media (VTM) prepared and validated to meet CLIA requirements is an acceptable alternative.
  - You may NOT use cotton tipped swabs, calcium alginate swabs or swabs with wooden shafts, as they may contain substances that inactivate some viruses and inhibit PCR testing.

We understand the availability for transport media is an immediate concern. Our Laboratory is continuing to evaluate other options for specimen collection supplies, and we will update this guidance accordingly as this information becomes available. At this time, alternatives such Amies-based transport media and saline are **NOT** acceptable until the use of this media can be validated and acceptable by all appropriate regulatory authorities. Specimen collection requirements are a critical factor to ensure our Laboratory is reporting accurate and reliable results.

Specimen Collection

- Nasopharynx (NP) swabs are acceptable.
- Specimens must be labeled with 2 identifiers: patient name and PUI LA 2020 number.
- Complete a LAB requisition form (LAB96) to accompany the sample. Enter the PUI # on the form as the second identifier.
- For prioritization, please indicate patient acuity in the top left corner of the Lab requisition form (Ex: ICU, inpatient, discharged from ED, healthcare worker working with vulnerable patients, etc.)
- **OPH Lab Requisition form** http://www.ldh.la.gov/assets/oph/Center-PHCH/Center-CH/lab/LabForms/Labform96072019.pdf.

Submitter Set-Up

Please complete this form as soon as possible . This form will allow the laboratory to update the main contact for your facility. It is a best practice to have a central Fax # for results and, if approved by the organization, a single, default Ordering Physician. Clinicians can be noted on the report without creating new entries in the LIMS system. Please encourage employees at your facility to direct questions to your central contact. The Submitter Update- Secure Fax Form can be found at: https://ldh-oph.qualtraxcloud.com/ShowDocument.aspx?ID=6435.

Specimen Transport

- Transport specimens at 2-8°C and ship for receipt within 72 hours of collection. Transport specimen to laboratory as soon as possible after collection. *Any specimens received outside of required temperatures will be rejected.* Adequate amounts of

coolant (e.g. ice packs, gel packs, etc.) need to be added during transport of the specimen to ensure arrival at 2-8°C.

- Alternately, if shipping is delayed, specimens should be frozen at -70°C or lower and shipped overnight on dry ice.

1. **Courier Transport**
   Once you obtain approval for testing by OPH IDEpi (1-800-256-2748) then you can request a pickup by emailing the courier directly at If you are in an area identified as a cluster of cases, then prescheduled, dedicated routes that have been implemented mean that you do not need to contact the courier.

   Released Patient Reports
   Results can be expected within 48-72 hours **upon specimen receipt at the OPH Laboratory** . Please allow ample time for analysis hours before contacting the laboratory. Providers will be contacted with patient positive results using the contact information provided on the Submitter Fax Form (above).

   Communications

   - For specimen related transport and analysis inquiries except results
   - Provider Help Phone Line: 225-219-5265 (M-F 8am-4:30pm) or email COVIDLAB@LA.GOV (7a-Midnight daily)
   - For approval to submit testing and test results contact Infectious Disease Epidemiology (IDEpi) Section: 1-800-256-2748