Health Alert Network Message 20-14: Update on Evaluation and Testing of Suspected COVID-19 Cases and Home Care Guidance for Patients and Physicians

Origination Date:	Revision Dates (list all revision dates):
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This is a message from the Louisiana Department of Health Emergency Operation Center (LDH EOC) for the Louisiana Health Alert Network (LA HAN). Please read the message below regarding an **update of the evaluation and testing of suspected COVID-19 cases and two attachments for home care guidance for patients (click here to view) and physicians (click here to view).** Please share and distribute this alert concerning the outbreak of COVID-19 with relevant stakeholders and partners through your own distribution channels.

Interim Guidelines for Collecting, Handling, and Testing Clinical Specimens from Persons Under Investigation (PUIs) for Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

UPDATES:

- All providers in Louisiana need to prepare to receive, test, and counsel a potential COVID-19 patient.
- **All patients with a fever, respiratory symptoms, and a negative influenza test in Louisiana should receive a COVID-19 test.**
- Priority PUI specimens (criteria below) will be tested at the State laboratory.
- COVID-19 specimens for ambulatory patients should be collected by the provider, not sent to LabCorp (or Quest) for specimen collection.
- All patients suspected (and undergoing testing) for COVID-19 should be given guidance to isolate at home until they receive their test results (attached).
- There is no COVID-19 "test kit". Use the same Viral Transport Media (VTM) or Universal Transport Media (UTM) you use for seasonal influenza.

- To conserve testing supplies and reagents, **use only a single NP swab per patient.**
- Establish processes to evaluate and test patients and with respiratory symptoms (e.g., **triage outside the door** , automatic facemasking, designated room (or outside if patient not seriously ill, respecting privacy) for testing, appropriate PPE for clinician, limiting test time, environmental cleaning.
- **Guidance now permits asymptomatic exposed healthcare personnel to work while wearing a facemask** (do not furlough asymptomatic healthcare providers).
- **Guidance for clinicians and to give to persons under investigation is attached to this Health Alert.**

1. **New Guidance for Testing at the State Laboratory**

Only the following patients are appropriate for 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.

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 criteria for state testing.

2. Testing Guidance for all symptomatic patients who do not fit the State Criteria: LabCorp (now) and Quest (soon).

Please note: LabCorp does not currently collect specimens at their sites for this test. **Patients for whom testing has been ordered should not be sent to a LabCorp location to have a specimen collected.** Instead, an appropriate specimen should be collected at the health care facility where the patient was seen and the test was ordered. The specimen should be sent to LabCorp using standard procedures.

If testing for other pathogens by the provider is done as part of the initial evaluation it should not delay patient evaluation and specimen shipping.

If a PUI tests positive for another respiratory pathogen, after clinical evaluation and consultation with public health authorities, they may no

longer be considered a PUI. This may evolve as more information becomes available on possible COVID-19 co-infections.

Specimen Type and Priority
For initial diagnostic testing for COVID-19, the State of Louisiana now recommends collecting and testing a single nasopharyngeal (NP). *Induction of sputum is not recommended*.

Specimens should be collected as soon as possible once a PUI is identified, regardless of the time of symptom onset. Maintain proper infection control when collecting specimens.

General Guidelines
Store specimens at 2-8°C and ship overnight to the State laboratory or LabCorp on ice pack. Label each specimen container with the patient's ID number (e.g., medical record number), unique specimen ID (e.g., laboratory requisition number), specimen type (e.g., serum) and the date the sample was collected. Complete an appropriate specimen form for each specimen submitted. In the box of the form, 1) for *test requested,* select "Respiratory virus molecular detection (non-influenza)".

Nasopharyngeal Specimens (only test one site)
Nasopharyngeal swab (NP swab). Submit only ONE to conserve testing supplies.

- Use only synthetic fiber swabs with plastic shafts. Do not use calcium alginate swabs or swabs with wooden shafts, as they may contain substances that inactivate some viruses and inhibit PCR testing. Place swab immediately into sterile tubes containing 2-3 ml of viral transport media.
- *Nasopharyngeal swab:*Insert a swab into the nostril parallel to the palate. Leave the swab in place for a few seconds to absorb secretions.

Storage

Store specimens at 2-8°C for up to 72 hours after collection. If a delay in testing or shipping is expected, store specimens at -70°C or below.

Shipping

Shipping guidance for specimens submitted to the State lab can be obtained by calling **1-(800) 256-2748.**

Specimens submitted to LabCorp should follow all testing and submission requirements for LabCorp (and Quest Labs, when testing becomes available).