

New Testing Guidance for COVID-19: March 15, 2020

The Louisiana Department of Health (LDH) is prioritizing testing of symptomatic individuals who had close contact with a laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 case, are part of an outbreak or have unexplained respiratory illness. The Department of Health recommends

other individuals be tested through commercial laboratory.

Precautions for all persons under investigation:

- Ask the patient to wear a surgical mask.
- Evaluate the patient in a private room with the door closed, if available.

- Initiate contact and use of personal protective equipment for all healthcare professionals and other staff entering the room.
- Airborne isolation rooms should be reserved for patients undergoing aerosol-generating procedures.

Additional recommendations on infection control for PUIs in healthcare settings: www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/infection-control.html

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.
- 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 criteria for state testing.

Testing guidance for all symptomatic (fever ≥ 100.4 , respiratory symptoms and negative influenza test) patients who do not fit the state criteria – private labs:

Please note: Private labs do not currently collect specimens at their sites for this test. Patients for whom testing has been ordered should not be sent to a private location to have a specimen collected. Instead, an appropriate specimen should be collected at the healthcare facility where the patient was seen and the test was ordered. The specimen should be sent to the private lab 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.

Specimen type and priority

For initial diagnostic testing for COVID-19, the State of Louisiana now recommends collecting and testing a single nasopharyngeal (NP).

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.

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.