

MARCH 16, 2020

HEALTH ADVISORY

Clarified COVID-19 Testing Guidance

The North Dakota Department of Health (NDDoH) is clarifying information regarding which patients should be tested for COVID-19. **Clinicians should use their judgment to determine if a patient has signs and symptoms compatible with COVID-19 and whether the patient should be tested.** Health care providers no longer need to call the NDDoH Division of Disease Control prior to testing. Providers must complete a [COVID-19 Evaluation and Test Report Form](#) and a [Test Request Form](#). Both forms must be included with the specimen. If the [COVID-19 Evaluation and Test Report Form](#) is not included with the specimen, that specimen may move to the bottom of the queue if specimens need to be prioritized. **Health care providers should not refer patients to the NDDOH for medical consultation or screening to determine the need for testing.**

For questions related to COVID-19, healthcare providers can call the new NDDoH Division of Disease Control at COVID-19 hotline at 888-391-3430 Sunday through Saturday, 24/7.

Health care providers may use the following guidance for testing patients:

Clinical Features	&	Epidemiologic Risk and Transmission Risk
Fever OR signs/symptoms of lower respiratory illness (e.g., cough or shortness of breath)	AND	History of travel from a geographic area* (international or domestic) with confirmed COVID-19 cases or close contact with a COVID-19 patient within the past 14 days
Fever WITH signs/symptoms of lower respiratory illness (e.g., cough or shortness of breath) requiring hospitalization	AND	No source of exposure has been identified
Signs/symptoms of respiratory illness (may be mild with symptoms such as fever/chills, sore throat, cough, headache or runny nose)	AND	History of exposure as described in number 1 AND works in a facility that serves a highly-susceptible population (e.g., Long-term care, hospital, basic care)
Fever OR signs/symptoms of lower respiratory illness (e.g., cough or shortness of breath)	AND	Resides in an institutional setting (e.g., Long-term care facility, basic care facility, group home)
Asymptomatic patients will NOT be tested for COVID-19 at the NDDoH.		

* See the CDC website for areas with sustained community COVID-19 transmission:

- International - www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html
- Domestic - www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/cases-in-us.html
- Cruise ships are unique environments where close person-to-person contact occurs. Providers should consider exposure on a cruise ship as an epidemiologic geographical risk.

Health care providers should continue to ask their patients about travel history, both internationally (including cruises) and domestic. **Asymptomatic patients should not be tested for COVID-19. Clinicians are encouraged to test for other causes of respiratory illness, including infections such as influenza.**

For initial diagnostic testing for COVID-19, the CDC recommends collecting and testing nasopharyngeal specimens. Please see [CDC's Interim Guidelines for Collecting, Handling, and Testing Clinical Specimens from Persons Under Investigation \(PUIs\)](#). Once the NDDoH Division of Microbiology has received the specimen, the turnaround time for results is one business day. In addition to traditional shipping methods, the NDDoH Division of Microbiology utilizes a [courier system](#) for specimen transport. Health care providers and/or laboratories should contact the NDDoH Division of Disease Control about high priority patients in order to facilitate transport of the specimen to the NDDoH in a timely manner. This is especially important on the weekends. **If a specimen is determined by the NDDoH to be a high priority, the NDDoH will facilitate pick up of the specimen.** High priority patients include patients who are severely ill (being admitted to ICU), health care workers, those who reside in group settings (i.e., long term care), and those reporting contact with a confirmed COVID-19 case.

All patients being tested for COVID-19 will need to be isolated (at home or in a hospital) while awaiting test results. Patients with confirmed COVID-19 should remain under isolation precautions until the risk of secondary transmission to others is thought to be low. Please see [CDC's Interim Guidance for Preventing the Spread of Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) in Homes and Residential Communities](#) for additional information about preventing COVID-19 transmission in the home. If COVID-19 testing is negative, individuals should stay home until well and fever free (without fever-reducing medications) for 24 hours. Please provide your patients with the [NDDoH fact sheet for people being tested for COVID-19](#).

Categories of Health Alert Network messages:

Health Alert	Requires immediate action or attention; highest level of importance
Health Advisory	May not require immediate action; provides important information for a specific incident or situation
Health Update	Unlikely to require immediate action; provides updated information regarding an incident or situation
HAN Info Service	Does not require immediate action; provides general public health information