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COVID-19 PUBLIC HEALTH LABORATORY TESTING GUIDANCE
For Health Care Providers and Laboratories
March 6, 2020

DIAGNOSTIC TESTING FOR HEALTH CARE

At this time, diagnostic testing for COVID-19 is available to licensed Health Care Providers through the California Department of Public Health Viral and Rickettsial Disease Laboratory (CDPH-VRDL) and a number of local Public Health Laboratories. If your Local Health Department or Public Health Laboratory does not currently have the capacity to test for COVID-19 virus, we encourage them to work with their catchment area Reference Public Health Laboratory or CDPH-VRDL as needed for testing. For counties without a Public Health Laboratory, specimen submission follows the protocol already established for Public Health Laboratory coverage for your jurisdiction. Please contact your Local Health Department if you have any questions about COVID-19 testing.

SPECIMEN TESTING APPROVAL

Please note that at this time, a Person Under Investigation (PUI) number is still required for Public Health Laboratory testing. Health care providers that identify patients for COVID-19 public health laboratory testing must contact their Local Health Department for novel coronavirus testing approval and guidance on specimen submissions for testing.

California Public Health Laboratory testing for the COVID-19 virus is available for patients meeting CDC criteria for PUIs as follows:

1. Patient is a new PUI who has not previously tested positive for COVID-19 virus at any laboratory, **AND**
2. Patient meets the CDC criteria ([CDC Corona Virus Disease 2019 Website Evaluating and Reporting Persons Under Investigation \(PUI\)](#)), **AND**
3. A unique PUI# has been assigned

For previous laboratory-confirmed cases or patients who may not meet the CDC PUI criteria, please contact your Local Health Department for guidance.

SPECIMEN TYPES AND LABELING



The CDC COVID-19 EUA diagnostic test is approved for upper and lower respiratory tract specimens. Upper respiratory specimens should include both a nasopharyngeal (NP) swab in viral/universal transport medium and a separately collected oropharyngeal (OP) swab in viral/universal transport medium. The NP and OP swabs should be placed in separate vials. A sputum specimen (in a sterile container) should also be sent if a productive cough is present, but sputum should NOT be induced. Serum, urine and stool specimens are not approved for EUA testing and are not requested at this time.

Please see this link for more details:

[CDC Corona Virus Disease 2019 Interim Guidelines for Collecting, Handling, and Testing Clinical Specimens](#)

Specimens must be accompanied by the required Public Health Laboratory testing form. All specimen forms must include the PUI number. Please contact your Local Health Department for instructions. Specimen type and patient information must be clearly indicated on the specimen tube for recognition by the Public Health Laboratory and correct matching of forms with specimens. Testing for specimens that are not properly labeled may be delayed or rejected.

Required Paperwork

Specimens for public health testing must be submitted with the following information:

- Disease Suspected: Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)
- Test Requested: 2019-nCoV PCR
- Case ID#: PUI number (please also include CalREDIE number if available)
- CDC PUI form: A completed CDC COVID-19 PUI and case report form ([PUI Form](#)). Local Health Departments may send a copy of the PUI form to CDPH at novelvirus@cdph.ca.gov or upload it to the Electronic Filing Cabinet (EFC) in CalREDIE
- Laboratory data: Any relevant laboratory data, such as respiratory test results
- Clinical information: Symptoms, hospitalization status, hospital name and location if applicable
- Travel Information: Location of travel, current location, exposure history (e.g., if contact to a known case), repatriation flight information (if applicable)

SAFETY

Health care providers and laboratories should be familiar with CDC biosafety guidelines for handling and processing potential novel coronavirus specimens. Manipulation of open containers of potentially infected specimens should only be performed in a certified Class II biological safety cabinet.

Safety guidelines for handling potentially infected specimens can be found here:

CDPH Infectious Diseases Laboratory Branch
850 Marina Bay Parkway, E361 • Richmond, CA 94804
(www.cdph.ca.gov)

[CDC Coronavirus Disease 2019 Interim Laboratory Biosafety Guidelines for Handling and Processing Specimens](#)

PACKAGING AND SHIPPING

Specimens for coronavirus testing must be packaged and shipped according to US Department of Transportation and International Air Transport Association (IATA) regulations for Category B, Diagnostic Specimens UN 3373. For the purpose of private courier transport between the collecting facility and the Public Health Laboratory, a small volume of Category B Diagnostic Specimens may be transported by employees of the facility or lab under the 49 CFR § 173.6 Materials of trade exceptions: [Code of Federal Regulations Title 49](#). If you do not already have a method for submitting specimens to your local Public Health Laboratory, please contact your Local Health Department for additional instructions.

Weekday Deliveries to Public Health Laboratories

High priority specimens should be packaged clearly labeled on the outside to expedite processing.

Weekend Deliveries to Public Health Laboratories

Please notify the Public Health Laboratory as soon as possible if any submissions are scheduled to arrive on Saturdays or Sundays (such as an overnight shipment sent on Friday or Saturday) to ensure that adequate staff will be available to test and receive the specimens. Weekend specimens should preferably be delivered **by courier, not commercial shipping company**, and a weekend point of contact must be provided to the laboratory in advance in order to facilitate successful weekend deliveries.

RESULTS

Positive and negative COVID-19 test results will be reported through the local Public Health Laboratory. Laboratory test turn-around time from specimen receipt to result is approximately 48 hours.

PUBLIC HEALTH REPORTING

We are requesting that Local Health Departments report all **positive** COVID-19 laboratory results **immediately** by telephone to CDPH at **(510) 255-8922**, which is being attended 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. When calling, please be prepared to provide the following information (which should not delay reporting if not known): PUI number, name, date of birth, county of residence, county of testing, name of person reporting, and a callback number. At the same time, send results in PDF format to the CDPH coronavirus Clinical Team at CoronavirusClinical@cdph.ca.gov.