Alaska Section of Epidemiology (SOE)
February 2, 2023

Key Points

- All facilities or organizations that administer or interpret COVID-19 testing must report laboratory-positive cases of COVID-19 to SOE preferentially via an electronic method. As able, facilities should integrate COVID reporting into their established route of reporting for other conditions of public health importance. Detailed Alaska Reporting Guidance can be found here.
- SOE staff can be reached for consultation at 907-269-8000 or 800-478-0084 (after-hours).
- The Alaska State Virology Laboratory in Fairbanks (ASVL) is running specimens 5 days per week (M–F, excluding holidays). Specimens must be submitted with a Respiratory Pathogen Test Request form.
- The testing landscape of COVID-19 has evolved over the past 3 years with more readily available at-home testing and reduction of free community testing sites. With various respiratory pathogens circulating in addition to SARS-CoV-2, overarching principles for disease control include:
  - Symptomatic people should act to minimize transmission to others by isolating until after symptoms have improved, including isolating until they are at least fever free for >24 hours. Guidance on duration of isolation specifically for COVID-19 is available from CDC.
  - Testing can assist in confirming a diagnosis and ensuring that those with high-risk conditions can be connected to treatment.
  - Pharmaceutical interventions (e.g., vaccination and treatment) and non-pharmaceutical interventions (e.g., masks, social distancing, and improving ventilation) can reduce transmission and/or reduce severe outcomes from COVID-19 and other respiratory pathogens.

Testing Principles

- An overview of testing for SARS-CoV-2 can be found here.
- When multiple respiratory pathogens are co-circulating, consider testing for multiple pathogens on symptomatic people, especially if the person is at high risk of severe disease and may be eligible for treatments.
- Decisions to test should not be based on vaccination status.
- Testing is recommended after exposure to SARS-CoV-2. Requirements or recommendations for routine screening may be present in some venues or local communities due to local/employer/business policy.
- CDC has guidance for healthcare facilities including nursing homes, other congregate settings, schools, and travel.
- Alaska information for those who work or live at a seafood processing facility is available here.
- Positive OTC tests that are self-collected and self-interpreted do not have to be reported to SOE. CDC information about at-home testing is available here.

Sequencing and Variant Detection

- All positive specimens collected in UTM/VTM or any Hologic Aptima Direct Load tubes should be submitted to ASVL for sequencing. Re-collection is not necessary; submit the remainder of the specimen.
- Specimens that are not collected in UTM/VTM or Hologic Aptima Direct Load tubes cannot be sequenced (this includes most specimens tested on rapid antigen assays).
- Specimens sent within 2 weeks of collection are prioritized.
- Send positive specimens as Category B samples to ASVL in Fairbanks, per shipping instructions.
- For more information about sequencing SARS-CoV-2 in Alaska, click here.
- For the most recent Alaska SARS-CoV-2 genomics results, please visit the genomics dashboard.

Please check the DOH COVID-19 website and CDC’s COVID-19 website frequently for updates.