

Alaska Public Health Alert

Updated Procedures for Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Testing in Alaska

March 13, 2020

Summary

The purpose of this alert is to update Alaska health care providers about new procedures and strategies for managing COVID-19 testing in Alaska given the ongoing global and national COVID-19 outbreak. [Alaska's first confirmed case of COVID-19](#) was identified on March 12; this was a *travel-associated* case, not a case of community-acquired infection.

What's New for Alaska Providers

- *ONLY nasopharyngeal swabs* are needed for testing (oropharyngeal swabs are optional).
- Please refer to the [Alaska Section of Public Health Laboratories homepage](#) for details regarding laboratory testing specifics.
- As of Mar. 10, 2020, health care providers **no longer** need to call the Alaska Section of Epidemiology (SOE) to approve testing.
 - Call SOE at **907-269-8000** or **800-478-0084** (after-hours) to consult about a specific patient or situation, especially those patients who will not be able to isolate in their own homes (e.g., homeless persons or travelers from out of town).
 - Provider **must** fill out a [COVID-19 Report Form](#) for each patient, regardless of which laboratory is performing testing.

Testing

Patients who have a [clinically compatible illness](#) (defined as fever and cough, or shortness of breath) AND at least one of the following criteria should be considered for testing:

Patient Criteria	Preferred Laboratory
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Had close contact to a laboratory-confirmed case of COVID-19	ASPHL*
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Has a history of travel to (not airport transit) or residence in a community where local transmission of COVID-19 is occurring within the past 14 days†	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hospitalized	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lives in a long-term care facility	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Health care worker (negative influenza test)	
<i>Individuals not meeting any of the above criteria:</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A person with mild illness who is at increased risk for serious illness from COVID-19, for example, person older than 60 years, chronic medical conditions	Commercial laboratory
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Any other patient as determined by clinical discretion	

*ASPHL laboratory supplies are limited, so please follow the preferred laboratory guidance closely.

†This situation is rapidly changing; please refer to [CDC](#), [WHO](#), and other available online resources to make this determination.

Currently there is widespread circulation of influenza, cold viruses, and RSV in Alaska. *Patients who are less likely to have had COVID-19 exposure may not need to be tested for COVID-19 if an alternate diagnosis has been confirmed.*

Specimen Collection Information for ASPHL

- Details on [page 23 of the Laboratory Test Directory](#); instructions for obtaining a NP swab on [page 95](#).
- Specimens are batched current turnaround time is 1–3 days.
- Certain specimens may be run on a STAT basis, in consultation with SOE.

This is a rapidly evolving situation, please check the SOE's [COVID-19 website](#) often for updates. Additional guidance is available on [CDC's COVID-19 website](#).