

Alaska Public Health Alert

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

March 21, 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.

Key Points

- Testing supplies are running low nationwide. Until this shortage is addressed, health care providers should prioritize testing to specific groups as per the updated table below.
- The Alaska State Public Health Laboratory (ASPHL) is running specimens 7 days a week.
 - STAT testing is generally not being offered.
- CDC guidance for discontinuation of home isolation for persons with COVID-19, available [here](#).
- *ONLY a nasopharyngeal swab* is needed for testing. Further CDC testing guidance is available [here](#).
 - Providers must fill out a [COVID-19 Report Form](#) for each patient, regardless of the testing lab.
- Health care providers **do not** need to call the Alaska Section of Epidemiology (SOE) to approve testing.
- Advise all persons who have travelled out-of-state in the past 14 days to adhere to the social distancing guidance in the [Alaska COVID-19 Out of State Travel Alert](#).
- SOE guidance on what outpatients should do if they have COVID-19 is available [here](#).
- FDA guidance on specimen transport media and swabs is available [here](#).
- Call SOE at **907-269-8000 or 800-478-0084** (after-hours) regarding outpatients who will not be able to isolate in their own homes (e.g., homeless persons or travelers from out of town).

Testing

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

Priority Level	Patient Criteria	Send Specimens to
High	• Hospitalized	ASPHL*
	• Lives in a long-term care facility	
	• Health care worker or first responder (e.g., police, fire, paramedic)	
	• Known close contact to a confirmed case of COVID-19 in the past 14 days	
	• Travel in the past 14 days to a location where community transmission of COVID-19 is occurring [‡]	
<i>Individuals not meeting any of the above criteria:</i>		
Medium [†]	• An outpatient who is at increased risk for serious illness (i.e., age ≥60 years or has one or more select chronic medical conditions , such as heart disease, lung disease, diabetes, immunocompromised)	Commercial laboratory
Low	• Any other patient as determined by clinical discretion	
DO NOT TEST	• Asymptomatic persons	DO NOT TEST

*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 online resources to make this determination.

[†]Clinical discretion required.

Specimen Collection Information

- 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.
- Consult individual commercial labs for specific instructions.

Please check [SOE's COVID-19 website](#) and [CDC's COVID-19 website](#) frequently for updates.