

This is a message from the Louisiana Department of Health Emergency Operation Center (LDH EOC) for the Louisiana Health Alert Network (LA HAN). Please read the message below regarding a **COVID-19 testing algorithm for clinicians and discontinuation of isolation guidance for healthcare workers with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 and three attachments with further guidance for patients and physicians**. Please share and distribute this alert concerning the outbreak of COVID-19 with relevant stakeholders and partners through your own distribution channels.

COVID-19 Testing Algorithm for Clinicians and Discontinuation of Isolation Guidance for Healthcare Workers with Suspected or Confirmed COVID-19.

UPDATES 3/15/2020:

- Please see attached algorithm to guide clinicians on testing patients for COVID-19.
- See Louisiana guidance for healthcare personnel with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 to discontinue isolation and return to work in the body of this Health Alert.
- Although this guidance is intended to guide healthcare workers in their return to work, it can be used as guidance for the general public as to when to discontinue isolation after COVID-19.

For samples sent to the State Lab:

- Break swab at the score so that the stick does not extend too far and prevent the cap from closing. Close cap tightly so there is no leakage which would put our scientists at risk.
- In the Patient information section of Lab 96 Form (after the Parish on the same line is good) indicate the status of the patient, ie ICU, ambulatory, being D/C'd from Emergency Department, etc.
- Turn Around Time is 24-72 hours from sample pickup by courier.

UPDATES 3/13/2020:

- All providers in Louisiana should be able to receive and counsel a potential COVID-19 patient, and test provided they have testing supplies. Check with your normal supplier and your commercial lab provider to restock testing supplies.
- **All patients with a fever, respiratory symptoms, and a negative influenza test in Louisiana should receive a COVID-19 test.**
- Priority PUI specimens (criteria below) will be tested at the State laboratory.
- COVID-19 specimens for ambulatory patients should be collected by the provider and the specimen sent to a commercial lab (such as LabCorp, Quest, etc) for test processing. Ambulatory patients should not be sent themselves to a commercial lab for specimen collection.
- All patients suspected (and undergoing testing) for COVID-19 should be given guidance to isolate at home until they receive their test results (attached). Clinicians who order a COVID-19 test are ultimately responsible for communicating results to that patient.
- There is no COVID-19 "test kit". Use the same Viral Transport Media (VTM) or Universal Transport Media (UTM) you use for seasonal influenza.
- To conserve testing supplies and reagents, **use only a single NP swab per patient.**
- Establish processes to evaluate and test patients and with respiratory symptoms (e.g., **triage outside the door** , automatic facemasking, designated room (or

outside if patient not seriously ill, respecting privacy) for testing, appropriate PPE for clinician, limiting test time, environmental cleaning.

- **Guidance now permits asymptomatic exposed healthcare personnel to work while wearing a facemask** (do not furlough asymptomatic healthcare providers).
- **Guidance for clinicians and to give to persons under investigation is attached to this Health Alert.**

Discontinuation of Isolation criteria for Healthcare Providers (HCP) with confirmed or suspected COVID-19

- Use one of the below strategies to determine when HCP may discontinue isolation and return to work in healthcare settings

1. *Testing- and symptom-based strategy* for HCP with confirmed COVID-19, exclude HCP from work until

o After resolution of fever **and**

o Resolution or improvement in respiratory symptoms, **and**

o Negative results of an FDA Emergency Use Authorized molecular assay for COVID-19 from at least two consecutive sets of paired nasopharyngeal and throat swabs specimens collected ≥ 24 hours apart

1. *Symptom-based strategy* (i.e., no SARS-CoV-2 testing to inform decision about discontinue Isolation return to work). Exclude from work until

o ≥ 7 days after illness onset, or ≥ 3 days after resolution of fever, whichever is longer **and**

o Resolution or improvement in respiratory symptoms

- If HCP were never tested for COVID-19 but have an alternate diagnosis (e.g., tested positive for influenza), criteria to discontinue isolation return to work should be based on that diagnosis.

Return to Work Practices and Work Restrictions

After returning to work, HCP should:

- Adhere to hand hygiene, respiratory hygiene, and cough etiquette (e.g., cover nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing, dispose of tissues in waste receptacles).
- Self-monitor for symptoms, and seek re-evaluation from occupational health if respiratory symptoms recur or worsen.
- Wear a facemask at all times while in the healthcare facility until all symptoms are completely resolved or until 14 days after illness onset, whichever is longer.

Be restricted from contact with severely immunocompromised patients (e.g., transplant, hematology-oncology) until 14 days after illness onset.

New Testing Guidance for COVID-19: March 15, 2020

The Louisiana Department of Health (LDH) is prioritizing testing of symptomatic individuals who had close contact with a laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 case, are part of an outbreak or have unexplained respiratory illness. The Department of Health recommends

other individuals be tested through commercial laboratory.

Precautions for all persons under investigation:

- Ask the patient to wear a surgical mask.
- Evaluate the patient in a private room with the door closed, if available.

- Initiate contact and use of personal protective equipment for all healthcare professionals and other staff entering the room.

- Airborne isolation rooms should be reserved for patients undergoing aerosol-generating procedures.

Additional recommendations on infection control for PUIs in healthcare settings: www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/infection-control.html

Only the following patients are appropriate for testing at the State Laboratory at this time:

- Hospitalized patients with a severe respiratory illness with no other known cause.
- Suspect outbreak of COVID-19 among associated individuals with recent onset of similar fever and lower respiratory symptoms.
- Recent fever and lower respiratory symptoms in a healthcare worker with direct contact to a laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 case.
- Suspect COVID-19 in a patient associated with a high-risk exposure setting such as a long-term care facility or a correctional facility.
- Suspect COVID-19 in a homeless patient.

Clinicians who suspect COVID-19 in a patient who fits the criteria for testing at the state laboratory should call 1-800-256-2748 for approval. Please DO NOT call the testing number for any patient not meeting criteria for state testing.

Testing guidance for all symptomatic (fever ≥ 100.4 , respiratory symptoms and negative influenza test) patients who do not fit the state criteria – private labs:

Please note: Private labs do not currently collect specimens at their sites for this test. Patients for whom testing has been ordered should not be sent to a private location to have a specimen collected. Instead, an appropriate specimen should be collected at the healthcare facility where the patient was seen and the test was ordered. The specimen should be sent to the private lab using standard procedures.

If testing for other pathogens by the provider is done as part of the initial evaluation, it should not delay patient evaluation and specimen shipping.

Specimen type and priority

For initial diagnostic testing for COVID-19, the State of Louisiana now recommends collecting and testing a single nasopharyngeal (NP).

Specimens should be collected as soon as possible once a PUI is

identified, regardless of the time of symptom onset. Maintain proper infection control when collecting specimens.

Nasopharyngeal specimens (only test one site)

Nasopharyngeal swab (NP swab). Submit only ONE to

conserve testing supplies.

- Use only synthetic fiber swabs with plastic shafts. Do not use calcium alginate swabs or swabs with wooden shafts, as they may contain substances that inactivate some viruses and inhibit PCR testing. Place

swab immediately into sterile tubes containing 2-3 ml of viral transport media.

- Nasopharyngeal swab: Insert a swab into the nostril parallel to the palate. Leave the swab in place for a few seconds to absorb secretions.

Preventing the Spread of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) in Homes and Residential Communities — Patients

Prevention steps for people with confirmed or suspected COVID-19 (including persons under investigation) who do not need to be hospitalized and people with confirmed COVID-19 who were hospitalized and determined to be medically stable to go home

- **Stay home except to get medical care.**
- **Separate yourself from other people and animals in your home.**
- **Call ahead before visiting your doctor.**
- **Wear a face mask.**
- **Cover your coughs and sneezes.**
- **Clean your hands often.**
- **Avoid sharing personal household items.**
- **Clean all “high-touch” surfaces every day.**
- **Monitor your symptoms.** Seek prompt medical attention if your illness is worsening (e.g., difficulty breathing). **Before** seeking care, call your healthcare provider.
- If you have a medical emergency and need to call 911, notify the dispatch personnel that you have or are being evaluated for COVID-19. If possible, put on a face mask before emergency medical services arrive.
- **Discontinuing home isolation.** Call your provider about guidance to discontinue home isolation.

Recommended precautions for household members, intimate partners, and caregivers in a non-healthcare setting of a patient with symptomatic laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 or a patient under investigation

Household members, intimate partners and caregivers in a non-healthcare setting may have close contact with a person with symptomatic, laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 or a person under investigation. Close contacts should monitor their health; they should call their healthcare provider right away if they develop symptoms suggestive of COVID-19 (e.g., fever, cough, shortness of breath).

Close contacts should also follow these recommendations:

- Make sure that you understand and can help the patient follow their healthcare provider’s instructions for medication(s) and care. You should help the patient with basic needs in the home and provide support for getting groceries, prescriptions, and other personal needs.
- Monitor the patient’s symptoms. If the patient is getting sicker, call his or her healthcare provider and tell them that the patient has laboratory-confirmed COVID-19. This will help the healthcare provider’s office take steps to keep other people in the office or waiting room from getting infected. Ask the healthcare provider to call the local or state health department for additional guidance. If the patient has a medical emergency and you need to call 911, notify the dispatch personnel that the patient has or is being evaluated for COVID-19.
- Household members should stay in another room or be separated from the patient as much as possible. Household members should use a separate bedroom and bathroom, if available.

Preventing the Spread of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) in Homes and Residential Communities — Patients

- Prohibit visitors who do not have an essential need to be in the home.
- Household members should care for any pets. Do not handle pets or other animals while sick.
- Make sure that shared spaces in the home have good air flow, such as by an air conditioner or an opened window, weather permitting.
- Perform hand hygiene frequently. Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains 60 to 95% alcohol, covering all surfaces of your hands and rubbing them together until they feel dry. Soap and water should be used preferentially if hands are visibly dirty.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.
- The patient should wear a face mask when you are around other people. If the patient is not able to wear a face mask (for example, because it causes trouble breathing), you, as the caregiver, should wear a mask when you are in the same room as the patient.
- Wear a disposable face mask and gloves when you touch or have contact with the patient’s blood, stool or body fluids, such as saliva, sputum, nasal mucus, vomit and urine.
 - Throw out disposable face masks and gloves after using them. Do not reuse.
 - When removing personal protective equipment, first remove and dispose of gloves. Then, immediately clean your hands with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Next, remove and dispose of face mask, and immediately clean your hands again with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Avoid sharing household items with the patient. You should not share dishes, drinking glasses, cups, eating utensils, towels, bedding or other items. After the patient uses these items, you should wash them thoroughly (see below “Wash laundry thoroughly”).
- Clean all “high-touch” surfaces, such as counters, tabletops, doorknobs, bathroom fixtures, toilets, phones, keyboards, tablets and bedside tables, every day. Also, clean any surfaces that may have blood, stool or body fluids on them.
 - Use a household cleaning spray or wipe, according to the label instructions. Labels contain instructions for safe and effective use of the cleaning product including precautions you should take when applying the product, such as wearing gloves and making sure you have good ventilation during use of the product.
- Wash laundry thoroughly.
 - Immediately remove and wash clothes or bedding that have blood, stool or body fluids on them.
 - Wear disposable gloves while handling soiled items and keep soiled items away from your body. Clean your hands (with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer) immediately after removing your gloves.
 - Read and follow directions on labels of laundry or clothing items and detergent. In general, using a normal laundry detergent according to washing machine instructions and dry thoroughly using the warmest temperatures recommended on the clothing label.
- Place all used disposable gloves, face masks and other contaminated items in a lined container before disposing of them with other household waste. Clean your hands (with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer) immediately after handling these items. Soap and water should be used preferentially if hands are visibly dirty.
- Discuss any additional questions with your state or local health department or healthcare provider. Check available hours when contacting your local health department.

Preventing the Spread of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) in Homes and Residential Communities — Providers

See full [CDC Interim Guidance](#) Update: February 14, 2020

This interim guidance may help prevent this virus from spreading among people in their homes and in other residential communities. This interim guidance is intended for:

- [People with confirmed or suspected COVID-19](#), including persons under investigation, who do not need to be hospitalized and who can receive care at home (see [Interim Guidance for Implementing Home Care of People Not Requiring Hospitalization for Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#));
- [People with confirmed COVID-19](#), who were hospitalized and then determined to be medically stable to go home (see [Interim Guidance for Implementing Home Care of People Not Requiring Hospitalization for Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#));
- Household members, intimate partners and caregivers in a non-healthcare setting of a person with symptomatic, laboratory-confirmed COVID-19.

[Prevention steps for people with confirmed or suspected COVID-19 \(including persons under investigation\) who do not need to be hospitalized and people with confirmed COVID-19 who were hospitalized and determined to be medically stable to go home](#)

Your healthcare provider and public health staff will evaluate whether you can be cared for at home. If it is determined that you do not need to be hospitalized and can be isolated at home, you will be monitored by staff from your local or state health department. You should follow the prevention steps below until a healthcare provider or local or state health department says you can return to your normal activities.

Stay home except to get medical care. You should restrict activities outside your home, except for getting medical care. Do not go to work, school, or public areas. Avoid using public transportation, ride-sharing, or taxis.

Separate yourself from other people and animals in your home.

- **People:** As much as possible, you should stay in a specific room and away from other people in your home. Also, you should use a separate bathroom, if available.
- **Animals:** You should restrict contact with pets and other animals while you are sick with COVID-19, just like you would around other people. Although there have not been reports of pets or other animals becoming sick with COVID-19, it is still recommended that people sick with COVID-19 limit contact with animals until more information is known about the virus. When possible, have another member of your household care for your animals while you are sick. If you are sick with COVID-19, avoid contact with your pet, including petting, snuggling, being kissed or licked, and sharing food. If you must care for your pet or be around animals while you are sick, wash your hands before and after you interact with pets and wear a face mask. See [COVID-19 and Animals](#) for more information.

Preventing the Spread of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) in Homes and Residential Communities — Providers

Call ahead before visiting your doctor. If you have a medical appointment, call the healthcare provider and tell them that you have or may have COVID-19. This will help the healthcare provider's office take steps to keep other people from getting infected or exposed.

Wear a face mask. You should wear a face mask when you are around other people (e.g., sharing a room or vehicle) or pets and before you enter a healthcare provider's office. If you are not able to wear a face mask (for example, because it causes trouble breathing), then people who live with you should not stay in the same room with you, or they should wear a face mask if they enter your room.

Cover your coughs and sneezes. Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw used tissues in a lined trash can. Immediately wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or, if soap and water are not available, clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.

Clean your hands often. Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing; going to the bathroom; and before eating or preparing food. If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol, covering all surfaces of your hands and rubbing them together until they feel dry. Soap and water are the best option if hands are visibly dirty. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.

Avoid sharing personal household items. You should not share dishes, drinking glasses, cups, eating utensils, towels or bedding with other people or pets in your home. After using these items, they should be washed thoroughly with soap and water.

Clean all "high-touch" surfaces every day. High touch surfaces include counters, tabletops, doorknobs, bathroom fixtures, toilets, phones, keyboards, tablets and bedside tables. Also, clean any surfaces that may have blood, stool or body fluids on them. Use a household cleaning spray or wipe, according to the label instructions. Labels contain instructions for safe and effective use of the cleaning product including precautions you should take when applying the product, such as wearing gloves and making sure you have good ventilation during use of the product.

Monitor your symptoms. Seek prompt medical attention if your illness is worsening (e.g., difficulty breathing). **Before** seeking care, call your healthcare provider and tell them that you have, or are being evaluated for COVID-19. Put on a face mask before you enter the facility. These steps will help the healthcare provider's office to keep other people in the office or waiting room from getting infected or exposed. Ask your healthcare provider to call the local or state health department. Persons who are placed under active monitoring or facilitated self-monitoring should follow instructions provided by their local health department or occupational health professionals, as appropriate. When working with your local health department check their available hours.

If you have a medical emergency and need to call 911, notify the dispatch personnel that you have, or are being evaluated for COVID-19. If possible, put on a face mask before emergency medical services arrive.

Preventing the Spread of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) in Homes and Residential Communities — Providers

Discontinuing home isolation. Patients with confirmed COVID-19 should remain under home isolation precautions until the risk of secondary transmission to others is thought to be low. The decision to discontinue home isolation precautions should be made on a case-by-case basis, in consultation with healthcare providers and state and local health departments.

Recommended precautions for household members, intimate partners and caregivers in a non-healthcare setting of a patient with symptomatic laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 or a patient under investigation

Household members, intimate partners, and caregivers in a non-healthcare setting may have close contact with a person with symptomatic, laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 or a person under investigation. Close contacts should monitor their health; they should call their healthcare provider right away if they develop symptoms suggestive of COVID-19 (e.g., fever, cough, shortness of breath).

Close contacts should also follow these recommendations:

- Make sure that you understand and can help the patient follow their healthcare provider's instructions for medication(s) and care. You should help the patient with basic needs in the home and provide support for getting groceries, prescriptions, and other personal needs.
- Monitor the patient's symptoms. If the patient is getting sicker, call his or her healthcare provider and tell them that the patient has laboratory-confirmed COVID-19. This will help the healthcare provider's office take steps to keep other people in the office or waiting room from getting infected. Ask the healthcare provider to call the local or state health department for additional guidance. If the patient has a medical emergency and you need to call 911, notify the dispatch personnel that the patient has, or is being evaluated for COVID-19.
- Household members should stay in another room or be separated from the patient as much as possible. Household members should use a separate bedroom and bathroom, if available.
- Prohibit visitors who do not have an essential need to be in the home.
- Household members should care for any pets in the home. Do not handle pets or other animals while sick.
- Make sure that shared spaces in the home have good air flow, such as by an air conditioner or an opened window, weather permitting.
- Perform hand hygiene frequently. Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains 60 to 95% alcohol, covering all surfaces of your hands and rubbing them together until they feel dry. Soap and water should be used preferentially if hands are visibly dirty.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.
- The patient should wear a face mask when you are around other people. If the patient is not able to wear a face mask (for example, because it causes trouble breathing), you, as the caregiver, should wear a mask when you are in the same room as the patient.
- Wear a disposable face mask and gloves when you touch or have contact with the patient's blood, stool or body fluids, such as saliva, sputum, nasal mucus, vomit and urine.

Preventing the Spread of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) in Homes and Residential Communities — Providers

- Throw out disposable face masks and gloves after using them. Do not reuse.
- When removing personal protective equipment, first remove and dispose of gloves. Then, immediately clean your hands with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Next, remove and dispose of face mask, and immediately clean your hands again with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Avoid sharing household items with the patient. You should not share dishes, drinking glasses, cups, eating utensils, towels, bedding or other items. After the patient uses these items, you should wash them thoroughly (see below “Wash laundry thoroughly”).
- Clean all “high-touch” surfaces, such as counters, tabletops, doorknobs, bathroom fixtures, toilets, phones, keyboards, tablets and bedside tables, every day. Also, clean any surfaces that may have blood, stool, or body fluids on them.
 - Use a household cleaning spray or wipe, according to the label instructions. Labels contain instructions for safe and effective use of the cleaning product including precautions you should take when applying the product, such as wearing gloves and making sure you have good ventilation during use of the product.
- Wash laundry thoroughly.
 - Immediately remove and wash clothes or bedding that have blood, stool or body fluids on them.
 - Wear disposable gloves while handling soiled items and keep soiled items away from your body. Clean your hands (with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer) immediately after removing your gloves.
 - Read and follow directions on labels of laundry or clothing items and detergent. In general, using a normal laundry detergent according to washing machine instructions and dry thoroughly using the warmest temperatures recommended on the clothing label.
- Place all used disposable gloves, face masks, and other contaminated items in a lined container before disposing of them with other household waste. Clean your hands (with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer) immediately after handling these items. Soap and water should be used preferentially if hands are visibly dirty.
- Discuss any additional questions with your state or local health department or healthcare provider. Check available hours when contacting your local health department.

Resources

- For the most up-to-date information, visit [cdc.gov/covid19](https://www.cdc.gov/covid19).
- For more information about COVID-19 in Louisiana, visit <http://www.ldh.la.gov/coronavirus>.
- For questions from the general public about COVID-19, call 211.