

TO: Vermont Health Care Providers and Health Care Facilities
FROM: Mark Levine, MD, Commissioner

Update on COVID-19 Diagnostic Testing in Vermont

This Health Alert supplements the following Health Advisories:

- March 25, 2020: [COVID-19: Additional Information Regarding Laboratory Testing](#)
- March 20, 2020: [COVID-19: Laboratory Testing Process Update](#)
- March 14, 2020: [COVID-19 Diagnostic Testing in Vermont](#)
- March 6, 2020: [Vermont Department of Health Laboratory Testing for Novel Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)

Background

At this critical juncture in our experience with COVID-19, employing the Stay Home, Stay Safe mitigation strategy, the Health Department is pursuing a parallel containment strategy to further “flatten the curve”. This HAN provides updated guidance to clinicians to allow more latitude in ordering COVID-19 testing to enhance our opportunity to test, isolate, contact trace, and when appropriate quarantine. This strategy has been shown elsewhere in the world to slow transmission of the virus. It can be employed now because we have enjoyed recent success in procurement of both specimen collection and test kits. While this risks drawing down our supplies more quickly, the timing is right to expand testing in the short term.

Currently, laboratory testing for SARS-CoV-2 (the etiologic agent for novel coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) disease) in Vermont patients is occurring at the Vermont Department of Health Laboratory and at commercial laboratories. The University of Vermont Medical Center (UVM-MC) is coordinating this testing.

As always, health care providers should use their clinical judgment to determine which of their patients should undergo diagnostic testing. Patients should continue to consult their provider to be considered for testing. Previously, a prioritization of specimens in terms of the turnaround time has been used. Now, with increased laboratory capacity for diagnostic testing, health care providers are encouraged to proceed to order testing for any symptomatic adult patient for whom infection with SARS-CoV-2 is a reasonable possibility.

The Health Department will be notifying patients of their SARS-CoV-2 results. We will not be contacting providers first to ensure that they have informed their patients before we reach out to do contact tracing.

REQUESTED ACTIONS:

Health care providers should continue to refer their patients to the same testing locations (e.g., at the hospital where they usually refer their patients or at a local FQHC). When possible, testing should be referred to centralized centers rather than having each practice attempt to

collect their own specimens to preserve PPE. Exceptions to this can be made on a case by case basis with factors including extreme stress on patients and families with use of drive through test centers.

Hospitals collecting specimens for diagnostic testing should reach out to the practices in their hospital service area to inform them of the procedures for referring patients for sample collection.

Special Considerations for the Pediatric Population

Clinicians should assess children for moderate to severe respiratory symptoms when considering testing, including if a child is ill enough to consider hospitalization.

If you have any questions, please contact the HAN Coordinator at 802-859-5900 or vthan@vermont.gov

HAN Message Type Definitions

Health Alert: Conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention.

Health Advisory: Provides important information for a specific incident or situation may not require immediate action.

Health Update: Provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; unlikely to require immediate action.

Info Service Message: Provides general correspondence from VDH, which is not necessarily considered to be of an emergent nature.