

MARCH 5, 2020

HEALTH ADVISORY

Updated Guidance for Evaluating and Reporting Persons Under Investigation (PUI) for COVID-19

Updated Guidance for International Travelers

The North Dakota Department of Health (NDDoH) is providing this updated information regarding which patients should be tested for COVID-19. As of March 3, 2020, the NDDoH Division of Microbiology has RT-PCR testing available for COVID-19.

The NDDoH recommends that the following individuals be considered a [person under investigation \(PUI\) and tested for COVID-19](#):

Clinical Features		&	Epidemiologic Risk and Transmission Risk
1	Fever OR signs/symptoms of lower respiratory illness (e.g., cough or shortness of breath) <u>without</u> an alternative explanatory diagnosis (e.g., influenza)	AND	History of travel from a geographic area* (international or domestic) with sustained community COVID-19 transmission or close contact with a COVID-19 patient within the past 14 days
2	Fever WITH signs/symptoms of lower respiratory illness (e.g., cough or shortness of breath) requiring hospitalization <u>without</u> an alternative explanatory diagnosis (e.g., influenza, RSV)	AND	No source of exposure has been identified
3	Signs/symptoms of respiratory illness (may be mild with symptoms such as fever/chills, sore throat, cough, headache and runny nose) <u>without</u> an alternative explanatory diagnosis (e.g., influenza)	AND	History of exposure as described in number 1 AND works in a facility that serves a highly-susceptible population (e.g., Long-term care, hospital, basic care)
4	Fever WITH signs/symptoms of lower respiratory illness (e.g., cough or shortness of breath) <u>without</u> an alternative explanatory diagnosis (e.g., influenza, RSV)	AND	Resides in an institutional setting (e.g., Long-term care facility, basic care facility, group home)

Asymptomatic patients will **NOT** be tested for COVID-19 at the NDDoH.

* See the CDC website for areas with sustained community COVID-19 transmission:

- International - www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html
- Domestic - www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/summary.html (Situation in the U.S.)
- Cruise ships are unique environments where close person-to-person contact occurs. Providers may consider exposure on a cruise ship as an epidemiologic geographical risk, especially if there has been documented associated COVID-19 cases.

Health care providers should continue to ask their patients about travel history, both internationally (including cruises) and domestic. Asymptomatic patients should not be tested for COVID-19. Clinicians are strongly encouraged to test for other causes of respiratory illness, including infections such as influenza. Clinicians may request influenza testing at the NDDoH Division of Microbiology along with COVID-19. The same nasopharyngeal swab in viral transport media (VTM) can be used for both influenza and COVID-19 RT-PCR. Remaining rapid influenza test aliquot cannot be used for COVID-19 testing, so if a rapid influenza test is performed, another NP swab in VTM will need to be collected.

For initial diagnostic testing for COVID-19, the CDC recommends collecting and testing upper respiratory (nasopharyngeal AND oropharyngeal swabs), and lower respiratory (sputum, if possible) for those patients with productive coughs. Please see [CDC's Interim Guidelines for Collecting, Handling, and Testing Clinical Specimens from Persons Under Investigation \(PUIs\)](#). Appropriate [personal protective equipment \(PPE\) and isolation precautions](#) should be adhered to during specimen collection.

Although COVID-19 testing is available at the NDDoH, the number of tests that the NDDoH is able to complete on a daily basis is currently limited. Additionally, influenza continues to be widespread in North Dakota, so not every individual with respiratory symptoms should be tested for COVID-19. Health care providers should use their best judgement when evaluating patients and consult the NDDoH if testing is warranted. Providers must call the NDDoH at 701-328-2378 or 800-472-2180 for a determination on testing for COVID-19 and to report a PUI. Once the NDDoH Division of Microbiology has received the specimen, the turnaround time for results is one to two business days. In addition to traditional shipping methods, the NDDoH Division of Microbiology utilizes a [courier system](#) for specimen transport.

All patients being tested for COVID-19 will need to be isolated (at home or in a hospital) while awaiting test results. Patients with confirmed COVID-19 should remain under 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 the NDDoH. Please see [CDC's Interim Guidance for Preventing the Spread of Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) in Homes and Residential Communities](#) for additional information about preventing COVID-19 transmission in the home. If COVID-19 testing is negative, individuals should stay home until well and fever free (without fever-reducing medications) for 24 hours. Please provide your patients with the [NDDoH fact sheet for people being tested for COVID-19](#).

The CDC also recently updated its guidance for social distancing for travelers to countries with Level 3 travel notices (China, South Korea, Italy, Iran). Travelers to countries with Level 3 travel notices are asked to practice social distancing, including staying home from work or school for

14 days after returning to the United States. These travelers should be advised to monitor themselves for symptoms of COVID-19 and take their temperature twice daily. If symptoms develop, these travelers should contact the NDDoH and/or their health care provider, prior to seeking health care (unless an emergency). The NDDoH has developed a self-report form for recent international travelers to complete online at www.health.nd.gov/diseases-conditions/coronavirus. After completion of the online form, these individuals will receive guidance on social distancing and self-monitoring. Travelers to countries with Level 2 travel notices (Japan) are also advised to monitor themselves for symptoms of COVID-19 and avoid public settings, however, these individuals may attend work and/or school, as long as asymptomatic. Travelers to other countries are also encouraged to complete the self-report form and will receive appropriate guidance from the NDDoH. Providers should routinely monitor CDC's COVID-19 travel page for updated guidance for travel risks at www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html.

Health care providers are invited to attend a webinar at noon (CT) on Monday, March 16 to learn more about COVID-19. Information about this webinar is forthcoming.

Categories of Health Alert Network messages:

Health Alert Requires immediate action or attention; highest level of importance
Health Advisory May not require immediate action; provides important information for a specific incident or situation
Health Update Unlikely to require immediate action; provides updated information regarding an incident or situation
HAN Info Service Does not require immediate action; provides general public health information