

Date:	April 27, 2020 revised
To:	All Northern Health Staff and Physicians
Cc:	Chief Operating Officers and Medical Directors; Dr. Ronald Chapman, VP Medicine; Kelly Gunn, VP Primary Community Care and Chief Nursing Executive; Lisette Vienneau, Regional Director Diagnostic Services; Dr. Azar, Medical Lead, Laboratory Services
From:	Dr. Raina Fumerton, Acting Chief Medical Health Officer Northern Health Emergency Operations Centre (EOC)
Re:	Novel coronavirus (COVID-19) – COVID-19 Testing Guidance for British Columbia April 20, 2020

Guidelines for COVID-19 testing in BC are updated based on the changing epidemiology, testing capacity, and our evolving understanding of test sensitivity in clinical settings.

There is evidence that community transmission of COVID-19 has decreased. In this context, it is critical to ensure timely identification of new infections and their contacts to prevent a re-emergence of COVID-19.

The most current guidelines are available on the BCCDC website at http://www.bccdc.ca/Health-Professionals-Site/Documents/BCCDC_PHL_Updated_nCoV_Lab_Guidance.pdf. (may not work in all browsers; Chrome is suggested) For your convenience, the most current guidelines are outlined below.

Guidance for COVID-19 Testing by Nucleic Acid Tests (NATs)

- 1. Test all individuals with new respiratory or systemic symptoms compatible with COVID-19, however mild.** Symptoms may include fever, chills, cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, odynophagia, rhinorrhea, nasal congestion, loss of sense of smell, headache, muscle aches, fatigue, or loss of appetite.
- 2. Individuals in the following groups should be prioritized for testing:**
 - a. Residents and staff of long term care facilities
 - b. Individuals requiring admission to hospital or likely to be admitted, such as pregnant women near term, patients on hemodialysis, or cancer patients receiving radiation or chemotherapy.
 - c. Health care workers
 - d. Individuals with a higher probability of being infected with COVID-19 such as contacts of a known case of COVID-19 and travellers who have just returned to Canada.
 - e. Residents of remote, isolated, or Indigenous Communities.
 - f. People living in congregate settings such as work camps, correctional facilities, shelters, group homes, assisted living, and seniors' residences.
 - g. People who are homeless or have unstable housing.
 - h. Essential service providers such as first responders.
- 3. Health care providers can order a COVID-19 test for any patient based on their**

clinical judgment.

4. **COVID-19 testing is not recommended for individuals without symptoms.**

5. **The Medical Health Officer may recommend testing for others**, such as those who are part of an investigation of a cluster or outbreak.

Guidance on Specimen Collection and Labeling: April 20, 2020

Specimen Collection

Collect a **Nasopharyngeal (NP) Swab** using the procedure described by the New England Journal of Medicine (Collection of Nasopharyngeal Specimens with the Swab Technique): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DVJNWefmHjE>

Use the swab/collection device provided by your institution. The most common swab types used are the Copan Universal Transport Medium (UTM) System and BD™ Universal Viral Transport System.



For hospitalized patients and/or patients with evidence of lower respiratory tract disease, collect a lower respiratory tract sample (e.g., sputum, endotracheal aspirate, bronchoalveolar lavage, etc.) in a sterile screw-top container **in addition to a nasopharyngeal swab.**

Specimen Labelling

All specimens (cylindrical tube) must have an attached label with:

- Patient name
- PHN or Date of Birth (DOB)
- Specimen type (e.g., NP swab)
- Date & time of collection

Please add one of the following codes to the specimen label:

- **HCW1** – Health care worker – direct care
- **HCW2** – Health care worker – non direct care
- **LTC** – Long-term care facility
- **OBK** – Outbreak
- **HOS** – Hospitalized
- **CMM** – Community or outpatient, including urgent and primary care centres
- **CGT** – People living in congregate settings such as work-camps, correctional facilities, shelters, group homes, assisted living and seniors' residences.

Please submit each specimen in an individual, sealed biohazard bag. Include a paper requisition, which clearly states the patient information, the ordering physician, and the test name (COVID-19 NAT).

Please refer to the BCCDC Public Health Laboratory eLab Handbook under COVID-19 test for specimen requirements: <http://www.elabhandbook.info/phsa/>
Paper Requisitions are available here: <http://www.bccdc.ca/resource-gallery/Documents/Guidelines%20and%20Forms/Forms/Labs/VI%20Req.pdf> (may not work in all browsers; Chrome is suggested)