



DPH COVID-19 Interim Call Management and Laboratory Testing Request Processes

March 7, 2020. Please note: This protocol will change frequently as the outbreak evolves

Due to the extremely large volume of calls requesting COVID-19 testing, DPH is pleased to institute an interim online testing request system prior to the widespread availability of commercial testing in the coming week. Limited laboratory testing capacity still necessitates triage and prioritization of testing requests based on risk in the interim. Additionally, DPH has established a call center to triage these calls. When a caller calls 866-PUB-HLTH, they are directed to an automated message.

- The general public is directed to a pre-recorded message about COVID-19. If callers need additional information, they have the options to speak to an attendant. These calls are directed to the DPH Emergency Operations Center call center which is staffed Monday-Friday 8:00-4:30 by trained DPH staff who can answer general questions, with the support of a Medical Epidemiologist to answer any clinical questions.
- If the caller is a healthcare provider and they have a patient they want evaluated for COVID-19 testing, they will be sent an email (Appendix A) with instructions for safe sample collection, homecare instructions for the patient, and a link to the online testing request system. If necessary, they have the option to speak with a Medical Epidemiologist. This test request system will ask for information about the patient's clinical picture, travel history, and potential exposures. The entries are reviewed by a Medical Epidemiologist between 8am-8pm daily and a testing determination will be made. Due to limited testing capacity, DPH must still screen patients and only test those that meet specific criteria (of highest risk or risk of severe outcomes):
 - If the patient is low risk (patient with respiratory illness who has not been in an area of active transmission and doesn't require hospitalization), they are directed to pursue COVID-19 testing at a commercial lab. The provider will receive a notification that COVID-19 testing at the Georgia Public Health Laboratory will not be provided and that they can opt to test the patient with a commercial laboratory test.
 - If the patient is high-risk (patient with respiratory disease and high risk of exposure such as visiting or living in an area with widespread community transmission, contact with a confirmed case, or a patient who is currently hospitalized with severe lower respiratory disease of unexplained etiology, who have a negative rapid flu test and RVP, if available), then they will be sent an email additional instructions for sample collection and submission to the Georgia Public Health Laboratory.

Appendix A

Dear Provider,

The Georgia Department of Public Health is pleased to announce a new online testing request system to streamline COVID-19 testing. Testing for patients with mild respiratory illness and no known exposure should be performed through a commercial laboratory. LabCorp is now performing testing for COVID-19; please call them or see their website for details on specimen submission. Quest Diagnostics will begin testing on Monday, March 9. We anticipate additional laboratories will be offering testing soon. Public Health will not triage calls about these patients.

If you have a patient with respiratory disease and high risk of exposure such as visiting or living in an area with widespread community transmission, contact with a confirmed case, or a patient who is currently hospitalized with severe lower respiratory disease of unexplained etiology, testing through public health will be available Monday – Sunday. In order to request COVID-19 testing, please complete a rapid influenza test, and a respiratory viral panel if available, and complete the Patient Under Investigation (PUI) report form at the following link: <https://sendss.state.ga.us/survey/form/12698>

You will NOT be able to return to the survey to make changes, so please complete it in one session. Be sure to complete the form thoroughly, including describing the clinical course of illness, and why you suspect COVID-19 for this patient. If you need to change information in the survey you submitted, please contact us at contactpublichealth@dph.ga.gov.

Once you complete the survey please collect the required specimens and store in your facility. A Medical Epidemiologist will review your paperwork between 8am and 8pm each day, and you will receive a separate email with a testing decision. If testing is approved, you will receive information with laboratory forms and shipping instructions. Do not ship samples without prior approval from DPH, this will significantly delay testing if later approved.

Required Specimens

Collect both upper respiratory (nasopharyngeal (NP) AND oropharyngeal (OP) swabs). For NP and OP swabs 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 swabs immediately into sterile tubes containing 2-3 ml of viral transport media. NP and OP specimens should be kept in separate vials.

Specimen Collection

Store swabs promptly after collection at 2-8° Celsius for no more than 72 hours prior to transporting. Guidance for safe sample collection: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/lab/guidelines-clinical-specimens.html>

Patient Care

Discharge

If your patient is healthy enough to be discharged, they must go home and self-isolate in their home to prevent the spread of disease until we have results. Share the following CDC guidance with the patient and caregiver:

1. How to safely self-isolate to prevent the spread of COVID-19 within the household: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/guidance-prevent-spread.html>
2. Steps to take if you are sick with COVID-19: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/steps-when-sick.html>

In-patient

If your patient is sick enough to be admitted please follow CDCs healthcare guidance: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/infection-control/control-recommendations.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fhcp%2Finfection-control.html. If possible, keep the patient in a negative pressure room, if this is unavailable, a private room with its own bathroom is recommended. Providers should use standard, contact, and droplet precautions with eye protection (e.g., goggles or a disposable face shield that covers the front and sides of the face).

Please contact 1-866-PUB-HLTH or contactpublichealth@dph.ga.gov if you have any questions.