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TO: Healthcare Providers, Healthcare Facilities, Clinical Laboratories, and Local Health Departments

FROM: New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH)  
Bureau of Communicable Disease Control (BCDC)

**HEALTH ADVISORY: NOVEL CORONAVIRUS DISEASE (COVID-19)**  
**UPDATE ON SPECIMEN COLLECTION GUIDANCE**  
**TO COLLECT NASOPHARYNGEAL SWAB ONLY**

**SUMMARY**

- COVID-19 community transmission has been detected in parts of the U.S., including NYS.
- COVID-19 testing is available at the NYSDOH Wadsworth Center, the New York City (NYC) Public Health Laboratory (PHL) and select clinical laboratories.
- For any suspect COVID-19 cases, ensure appropriate infection control precautions and immediately notify the infection control lead at your facility and the local health department (LHD).
- Review local testing options for those who do not require clinical outpatient/inpatient medical care.
- Collect a nasopharyngeal (NP) swab for initial diagnostic testing for COVID-19

**SITUATION UPDATE**

- As of March 17, 2020, the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#) reported 4,226 COVID-19 cases with 75 deaths nationally.
- As of March 17, 2020, the [NYSDOH](#) had 1,374 reported cases of COVID-19; 730 in NYS (outside of NYC) and 644 in NYC, with 7 deaths.
- Molecular testing (rRT-PCR) for SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, is available under FDA emergency use authorization at the Wadsworth Center, the NYC PHL, and the Erie County PHL.
- Commercial and hospital clinical laboratories have also started testing for COVID-19. More laboratories are expected to begin testing within the coming days or weeks.

**COVID-19 SPECIMEN COLLECTION AND HANDLING**

- Collect a nasopharyngeal (NP) swab for initial diagnostic testing for COVID-19 placed in a Viral Transport Media (VTM) vial.
  - Oropharyngeal swab and sputum are no longer recommended for initial testing.
  - Sputum or lower respiratory specimens such as bronchoalveolar lavage (BAL) or tracheal aspirate testing may be considered, as clinically appropriate, and can be sent to a commercial or clinical laboratory. Collection of sputum should only be done for those patients with a productive cough. Induction of sputum is not recommended.
- For testing at a clinical laboratory, follow laboratory guidance for specimen collection, handling, and transport processes.
- Further testing at the Wadsworth Center guidance can be found on the [NYSDOH COVID-19 healthcare](#)

[provider website](#) including:

1. [NYSDOH Wadsworth Center COVID-19 Specimen Collection, Handling, and Transport Instructions](#)
2. [NYSDOH Wadsworth Center Infectious Disease Requisition \(IDR\) Form](#) (the IDR form must be filled out for each patient and sent to the Wadsworth Center with the specimen).
3. [NYSDOH Wadsworth Center Packaging and Transport Illustrated Checklist](#)

*Providers who have questions can contact their [LHD](#) or the NYSDOH Bureau of Communicable Disease Control at 518-473-4439 during business hours or 1-866-881-2809 evenings, weekends, and holidays.*

## **RESOURCES**

[NYS Local Health Department Directory](#)

[NYSDOH COVID-19 website](#)

[CDC COVID-19 website](#)

[World Health Organization \(WHO\) COVID-19 website](#)