

STATE OF CONNECTICUT

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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COVID-19 Testing for Long-Term Care Facilities and Congregate Settings – April 22, 2020

Due to global supply chain disruptions and significant demand, COVID-19 specimen collection, transport, and testing supplies are extremely limited. Current shortages affecting COVID-19 testing include:

- Nasopharyngeal (NP) swab supply is critically low
- Oropharyngeal (OP) swabs supply is very low
- Viral Transport Media/Universal Transport (VTM/UTM) supply is critically low

Considering these shortages, the Connecticut Department of Public Health (DPH) is taking action to derive the greatest public health benefit from the limited resources available at this time.

Specimen Collection Supplies

Facilities should be judicious in the use of specimen collection kits. At this time, testing should only be used to guide decisions about patient cohorting and outbreak management. We do not yet have enough testing resources to test more broadly.

The State Public Health Laboratory (SPHL) should be used as a resource for specimen collection supplies only for those facilities in need of testing supplies for imminent use. All commercial sources must have been exhausted and/or delivery of ordered resources should be pending.

In addition to procurement of swabs from commercial vendors, facilities should identify any appropriate resources that might already be available on-site.¹ In general, acceptable swabs have a synthetic tip (such as nylon or Dacron) and an aluminum or plastic shaft. Calcium alginate swabs and swabs with cotton tips and/or wooden shafts are not acceptable. Influenza test kits can be used for SARS-CoV-2 testing. NP swabs from Influenza test kits with expired transport media can be used; please contact SPHL Scientific Support Services at 860-920-6674 for replacement transport media. Please see Reference #1 for a list of alternative swabs and media that can be used.

Requests for test kits from SPHL will be limited to 6 collection kits per location. Please do not request kits for future use to ensure availability for those with immediate needs. Due to a critical shortage of nasopharyngeal swabs, SPHL distributions of specimen collection kits at this time will include oropharyngeal swabs (OP) only.

Requests for collection supplies in keeping with the guidance above can be made by calling Scientific Support Services at 860-920-6674 or by submitting an email request to dph.outfitroom@ct.gov. Requested supplies can be picked up weekdays 8AM–4PM and weekends 8AM–12noon. Specimens may be dropped off at SPHL for testing at any time.



Phone: (860) 509-7995 • Fax: (860) 509-7910
Telecommunications Relay Service 7-1-1
410 Capitol Avenue, P.O. Box 340308
Hartford, Connecticut 06134-0308
www.ct.gov/dph

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If a facility feels that greater than 6 test kits are needed for outbreak management and patient cohorting purposes^{2,3}, please reach out to the Healthcare-Associated Infections & Antimicrobial Resistance (HAI-AR) Program CT DPH at 860-509-7995 for further guidance on testing stewardship and strategy.

Due to shortages in VTM/UTM, SPHL has been preparing and distributing COVID-19 test collection kits with saline as an alternative media.¹ Please note that at SPHL, saline is an acceptable alternate media for SARS-CoV-2 testing only. Test kits containing saline cannot be used to request simultaneous influenza or respiratory viral panel (RVP) testing. To meet the current COVID-19 demands, SPHL must temporarily suspend testing for influenza and other non-influenza respiratory viruses (RVP) until further notice. This testing will only be available on a case-by-case basis upon consultation with the CT DPH Epidemiology and Emerging Infections Program at 860-509-7994.

Laboratories for Specimen Testing

In addition to SPHL, at least four private laboratories in Connecticut can test specimens from congregate settings. CT DPH does not endorse any particular vendor. This list of vendors will be updated as more information becomes available. Please contact the individual laboratories for detailed submission protocols.

Genesys Diagnostics Inc. | gdilabs.com

Dr. Suneeta Ahuja, President/CEO
8 Enterprise Lane Oakdale CT 06370
Phone (860) 574-9172

The Jackson Laboratory for Genomic Medicine | jax.org

Charles Lee, Ph.D., FACMG, Director and Professor
10 Discovery Drive Farmington CT 06032
Phone (860) 837 2474

Sema4 | sema4.com

Emmett Higgins, VP Laboratory Operations
333 Ludlow St. Ste 3 Stamford, CT 06902
Phone (212) 241-3036

Yale Pathology

Kevin Schofield, Associate Director
Outreach Clinical Operations, Manager
310 Cedar Street New Haven, CT 06520-8023
Phone (203) 737-2928

Safe Specimen Collection Procedure

Collection of COVID-19 specimens from patients in skilled nursing or assisted living facilities is safest using a buddy system: The “Collector” collects the nasopharyngeal (NP) or Oropharyngeal (OP) swab, and the “Assistant” allows for a clean hand-off to the courier transporting to the processing laboratory.

1. Collector is donned in appropriate PPE.⁴
2. Assistant is wearing gloves.
3. Collector opens pre-packaged vial and swab kit.
4. Collector verifies and handwrites patient name and DOB on specimen label on Transport Media (VTM/UTM/Saline) tube.
5. Collector enters patient’s room with pre-labeled vial and swab and closes patient room door to minimize risk and exposure to droplets.
6. Collector collects NP or OP per protocol,⁵ breaking off swab shaft and threading cap on vial completely to guard against leakage.
7. Assistant stands outside patient room entrance, verbally checks with RN that specimen cap is secured, and holds open biohazard bag for Collector.
8. Collector will carefully drop specimen vial into biohazard bag, taking care to not touch sides of open bag.
9. Assistant will seal bag and wipe down with sanitizing cloth.
10. Collector will doff PPE as appropriate and perform hand hygiene.
11. Assistant will package specimen on ice.
12. Assistant will send to specimen to the processing laboratory with corresponding test requisition.⁶

References

Note that COVID-19 websites are updated regularly.

1. FDA. FAQs on Diagnostic Testing for SARS-CoV-2, "What if I am having trouble obtaining VTM/UTM and a flocked nasopharyngeal swab to collect and transport patient samples. Are there alternatives that I can use?: <https://www.fda.gov/medical-devices/emergency-situations-medical-devices/faqs-diagnostic-testing-sars-cov-2#whatif>
2. CDC. Preparing for COVID-19: Long-term Care Facilities, Nursing Homes: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/long-term-care.html>
3. CDC. Healthcare Infection Prevention and Control FAQs for COVID-19: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/infection-control-faq.html>
4. CDC. Using Personal Protective Equipment (PPE): <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/using-ppe.html>
5. CDC. Interim Guidelines for Collecting, Handling, and Testing Clinical Specimens from Persons for Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19): <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/lab/guidelines-clinical-specimens.html>
6. Dr. Katherine A. Kelley State Public Health Laboratory Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Clinical Test Requisition: <https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/Departments-and-Agencies/DPH/laboratory/labhome/lab-forms/2019nCoV-req20final.pdf>