March 12, 2020

Dear Healthcare Partners:

This communication is to provide important updates and reminders regarding the process for COVID-19 testing. Recently, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention updated the Criteria for Evaluating and Reporting Persons Under Investigation (PUI) for COVID-19; this expanded testing to a wider group of SYMPTOMATIC patients. The new criteria for evaluation of PUI recommends that clinicians use their judgment to determine if a symptomatic patient has the exposure history and signs and symptoms compatible with COVID-19 to warrant testing.


Decisions about which patients warrant testing should be based on:

1. **Epidemiologic factors** that could have put patient at risk for exposure to SARS-CoV-2, such as:
   a. Any persons, including healthcare workers, who have had close contact with a laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 patient within 14 days of symptom onset
   b. Persons with a history of travel from affected geographic areas within 14 days of symptom onset. Relevant affected areas will be defined as a country with at least a CDC Level 2 Travel Health Notice https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/

2. **The clinical course of illness**
   a. Most patients with confirmed COVID-19 have developed fever and/or symptoms of acute respiratory illness (e.g., cough, difficulty breathing).
   b. Clinicians are encouraged to perform testing for other respiratory pathogens, such as influenza and a respiratory panel, prior to considering COVID-19 testing.

If your agency has a patient that meets the above criteria but does not have the equipment and supplies necessary to perform testing, your agency will need to identify where that patient can receive testing and call ahead so that proper precautions can be taken. NOW is the time to review your organization’s plan and protocol when dealing with potential communicable diseases, and to ensure strategies are in place to prevent spread among other clients and staff, such as telephone triage, cleaning measures, and considering specific waiting room/patient room assignments to ensure social distancing and respiratory precautions as needed.

Until commercial and healthcare facility-based lab testing is available, the MDHHS Bureau of Laboratories (BOL) remains the only lab in Michigan able to perform COVID-19 testing; your local health department will assist with paperwork and an ID number to ensure testing is completed at the state
laboratory. If you have a patient that meets the clinical and epidemiologic criteria for COVID-19 testing, as described above, AND can collect the specimens, the process for testing is as follows:

1. Provider requesting testing calls the Communicable Disease program at their local health department to request an “nCoV ID” number. Staff may help provide guidance based on the above criteria, but please know that the decision to test will be based on the bedside clinician’s best judgment. Please have patient’s name, date of birth, and address ready to expedite this process.

2. The provider will be asked to complete the Michigan 2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) Person Under Investigation (PUI) and Case Report Form (attached to this alert). This form is also available at: www.michigan.gov/coronavirus in the “For Health Professionals” section, and at https://www.grandtraverse.org/2231/COVID-19-Novel-Coronavirus. The “nCoV ID” must be filled in on this PUI and Case Report form.

3. Once the PUI and Case Report form is completed, transmit a copy to your local health department and include the original with the specimens.

4. If the laboratory your agency utilizes is Munson Medical Center Laboratory, specimens will be shipped to the MDHHS BOL from there. If your agency does not utilize the Munson Medical Center Laboratory, please contact your local health department for further guidance regarding shipping.

CONTACT INFORMATION at the GRAND TRAVERSE COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT:
You can reach a Communicable Disease nurse Monday-Friday, 8 – 4:30 pm, at:
- Phone: 231-995-6125
- Fax: 231-995-6126

IF YOU HAVE A PATIENT REQUIRING TESTING AFTER-HOURS and ON WEEKENDS:
Please complete the PUI Case Report Form and fax it to the Health Department. We will be coordinating with the Munson Medical Laboratory Center each morning to ensure that all specimens and paperwork have been generated an nCoV ID. Communicable Disease staff will follow-up with the ordering provider’s office, as well as the patient, as soon as possible.

IF YOU HAVE A PATIENT THAT WARRANTS TESTING and they are returning home from your office, PLEASE inform the patient that they MUST self-isolate at home until test results are returned. The patient should understand that they must stay at home and NOT go to work, school or other public places. Suspect cases should separate themselves from others in the home, and avoid all visitors. If the patient needs further urgent medical care in the interim, please ask them, if able, to call ahead and explain that they are waiting on test results for COVID-19 so that proper precautions can be taken by receiving staff.

Specimen Collection
For initial diagnostic testing for COVID-19, CDC recommends collecting and testing upper respiratory (nasopharyngeal AND oropharyngeal swabs), and lower respiratory (sputum, if possible) for those patients with productive coughs. Induction of sputum is not recommended. Maintain proper infection control when collecting specimens.

Sputum
Have the patient rinse the mouth with water and then expectorate deep cough sputum directly into a sterile, leak-proof, screw-cap sputum collection cup or sterile dry container.
Nasopharyngeal swab AND oropharyngeal swab (NP/OP swab)
Use only synthetic fiber swabs with plastic shafts. Do not use calcium alginate swabs or swabs with wooden shafts. Place swabs immediately into sterile tubes containing 2-3 ml of viral transport media. NP and OP swabs may be kept in separate vials or combined at collection into a single vial (preferred). Swabs that are received dry, without transport media, are not able to be tested.

Label each sample with patient name, date of birth, and source (i.e, NP, OP, or sputum). Refrigerate all specimens until shipping occurs.

Results
Results will be sent from MDHHS BOL to both the ordering provider and the local health department. Positive results from MDHHS BOL are considered PRELIMINARY and will be confirmed by the CDC lab. Results will typically take 2-3 days to return, or longer if testing occurs on the weekend.

The potential health threat posed by COVID-19 is high, both globally and to the US; individual risk is dependent on exposure. Under current circumstances, certain people will have an increased risk of infection, such as healthcare workers caring for patients with COVID-19, close contacts of persons with COVID-19, and travelers returning from affected locations where community spread is sustained and ongoing. The Grand Traverse County Health Department is recommending that local healthcare providers review and update the respiratory protection plan for their office, to ensure staff and community safety and peace of mind. Information for healthcare professionals, including guidance on Persons Under Investigation (PUI), clinical care, infection control and personal protective equipment, is available at the CDC website: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/index.html

This outbreak is rapidly changing, with new information becoming available daily. The Grand Traverse County Health Department remains committed to keeping our community healthy and will provide updates and guidance as necessary and requested. For questions related to COVID-19, please call the Communicable Disease program at 231-995-6125. To stay up-to-date on the evolving situation, please refer to the following websites: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html https://www.michigan.gov/coronavirus http://www.gtchd.org/2231/Coronavirus

If your agency is not receiving alerts and updates from the Michigan Health Alert Network (MiHAN), sign up at https://michiganhan.org/.