Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH)
Alabama Emergency Response Technology (ALERT)
Health Alert Network (HAN)
April 24, 2020

UPDATE to COVID-19 Testing and Specimen Collection

**URGENT UPDATE:** Expanded Testing Criteria and Addition of Nasal Swab Specimens

The Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH) has expanded the criteria for testing at the Bureau of Clinical Laboratories (BCL). Persons with moderate, severe, or worsening symptoms now qualify for testing at the Bureau of Clinical Laboratories (BCL) with no additional risk factors. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and ADPH continue to recommend against RT-PCR testing of asymptomatic patients and persons with mild symptoms and no other risk factors.

**Tests to be performed by the BCL must meet the following criteria:**

The patient is a resident of a long-term care facility and the facility has laboratory-confirmed cases in residents or staff, or

The patient is symptomatic with at minimum (measured or subjective fever OR cough OR shortness of breath, and

- hospitalized, or
- immunocompromised or has co-morbidities, or
- age 65 years or older, or
- a healthcare worker, or
- associated with a long-term healthcare facility, or
- has moderate, severe, or worsening symptoms.

In addition to the above criteria, there may be situations such as facility-wide outbreaks or clusters of cases in a company or community that require review to determine the appropriate next steps on a case-by-case basis in consultation with ADPH physicians. The above criteria are recommended by CDC and required for testing at BCL unless approval has been given by an ADPH physician in coordination with BCL to assure that the specimens are tested.

Providers are free to order testing for persons not meeting the above criteria but are asked to use a commercial or clinical laboratory they have an agreement with.

April 24, 2020
The Novel Coronavirus PUI Form should be completed for all persons suspected of having COVID-19 regardless of whether the decision is made to test and also regardless of whether specimens will be sent to BCL or another testing facility. The electronic process results in quicker and more complete access to the required information necessary for testing and for initiation of the investigation and contact tracing. Please access the link at https://epiweb.adph.state.al.us/redcap/surveys/?s=TATDDJ8Y88

ADPH has added the ability for providers to collect nasal swabs and to allow for patient self-collection of nasal swabs in order to increase collection capacity. When nasal specimens are collected, a single swab should be inserted 1 to 1.5 cm into each nostril. The swab should be rotated against the inside of the nostril for 3 seconds while applying pressure with a finger to the outside of the nostril. Nasopharyngeal (NP) and oropharyngeal (OP) swabs remain preferred and should be obtained by a trained collector. Viral transport media or universal transport media should be used for the submission of specimens to BCL. Normal saline is not an acceptable media for the collection of specimens for testing at BCL.

Laboratories are required to report all negative and positive COVID-19 virus test results electronically (faxes do not count). If not already enrolled, laboratories will need to manually enter test results directly into the surveillance system; contact ALNEDSSsupport@adph.state.al.us to enroll staff today.