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March 25, 2020

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 AND HANDLING
TO INCLUDE NASAL SWAB AND OROPHARYNGEAL SWAB SPECIMEN ALTERNATIVE**

SUMMARY

- COVID-19 community transmission has been detected in New York State.
- COVID-19 testing is available at the NYSDOH Wadsworth Center and select clinical laboratories.
- For any suspected 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.

SITUATION UPDATE

- As of March 24, 2020, there have been 48,289 COVID-19 cases with 590 deaths in the United States.
- As of March 24, 2020, [New York](#) had 25,665 reported cases of COVID-19 with 14,904 in NYC and 10,1761 in the rest of state with 210 deaths.

COVID-19 SPECIMEN COLLECTION AND HANDLING

- Collect a **nasopharyngeal (NP) swab** for initial diagnostic testing for COVID-19, placed in a vial containing Viral Transport Media (VTM) or Molecular Transport Media (MTM).
 - 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.
- If NP swab supplies are **unavailable**, NYSDOH Wadsworth Center and Bioreference Laboratory can receive **nasal swab combined with oropharyngeal swab as an acceptable alternative**.
 - Collect a nasal swab AND oropharyngeal (OP) swab for initial diagnostic testing for COVID-19, placed in a single vial containing 1.5-2mL of VTM or MTM.
 - If NP swab supplies become available, clinicians should return to using NP swab for specimen collection per the above guidance.

- If using a laboratory other than the Wadsworth Center or Bioreference Laboratory, follow the laboratory's guidance for specimen collection, handling, and transport processes, including if nasal swab with OP swab specimen is an acceptable alternative to NP.
- Flocked swabs are preferred as they provide better specimen recovery. Sterile dacron or rayon swabs with plastic or flexible metal handles may also be used. These are the same types of swabs and media used for influenza PCR testing. Do NOT use cotton or calcium alginate swabs or swabs with wooden sticks as they contain substances that inactivate some viruses and inhibit PCR.
- Further testing guidance can be found on the [NYSDOH COVID-19 website](#) including:
 1. Specimen collection, storage, and packaging guidance.
 2. A Wadsworth Center Infectious Disease Requisition (IDR) form. This form must be filled out for each patient and sent to the Wadsworth Center with the specimen.
 3. A packaging and transport checklist.
- If COVID-19 is suspected, HCPs should IMMEDIATELY:
 1. Implement infection control precautions as directed by CDC's [Interim Infection Prevention and Control Recommendations for COVID-19 in Healthcare Settings](#).
 2. Contact your Infection Preventionist or Infection Control Lead.

Providers who have questions can contact their [LHD](#) or the NYSDOH Bureau of Communicable Disease Control at 518-473-4439 8:00 am to 5:00 pm or 1-866-881-2809 during evenings, weekends, and holidays.

RESOURCES

- [NYSDOH COVID-19 Website](#)
- [NYS Local Health Department Directory](#)
- [CDC COVID-19 Website](#)
- [World Health Organization \(WHO\) COVID-19 Website](#)