

# Health Alert

## COVID-19 Update

March 7, 2020

Whatcom County Health Department Communicable Disease & Epidemiology Division

### Actions Requested and Key Updates:

- Testing for SARS-CoV-2 (rRT-PCR) is available commercially. Testing at DOH Public Health Lab (PHL) had been the only source until UW started providing commercial testing last week. Other commercial labs (Quest, Kaiser, Lab Corp, and others) have started or will start providing testing soon. Quest plans to start on 3/9/20.
- Testing at DOH PHL had been provided based on clinician's judgement (independent of exposure risk factors or severity of illness), but on 3/6/20, DOH has established criteria for determining whether they will test.
- Public health approval is needed only for testing requested at DOH PHL. It is not required to order from commercial labs.
- The previous requirement (from 3/1/20 Health Alert) for **rapid influenza and respiratory panel PCR** testing for all patients meeting PUI criteria or for whom you otherwise plan to notify or consult the Whatcom County Health Department (WCHD) **is no longer required**, but evaluating for alternative diagnoses is still recommended.
- Notify the WCHD Communicable Disease Program if you order COVID-19 testing on a hospitalized patient or a person who is a close contact to a lab-confirmed case if testing is ordered commercially.
- Infection Control guidelines have been changed by DOH/WSHA to limit airborne precautions for suspected or confirmed COVID-19 cases to aerosol-generating procedures and not for general patient care.
- Case definitions, laboratory capacity and clinical guidance are likely to change frequently. Stay tuned for updates and frequently monitor the CDC and the Washington DOH websites for COVID-19.

There are NO confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Whatcom County at this time. As of noon 3/7/20, 12 people have test results pending at the public health lab, and 3 have had negative results. With community spread of the virus in King and Snohomish Counties, and new cases reported in Grant, Pierce, and Clark Counties, the risk is rising that our communities will become more impacted. We are likely to have cases in Whatcom County in the coming days or weeks. Guidance in response to the outbreak is changing rapidly. This alert details the latest recommendations at this time. We include links to the source guidance documents which may be updated shortly.

We know that your clinics have had a surge in calls and visits from patients concerned about COVID-19. Most people with COVID-19 will have mild symptoms and can recover safely at home. Patients who do not have a high-risk condition and whose symptoms are mild do not need to be tested for COVID-19.

Please use the following helpful documents to inform patients and your conversations with them (see Patient Handouts in References below for links) :

- What to do if you have confirmed or suspected coronavirus disease (COVID-19)
- What to do if you were potentially exposed to someone with confirmed coronavirus disease (COVID-19)
- What to do if you have symptoms of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) and have not been around anyone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19

## Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) Update

WSHA, Washington Department of Health (DOH), and UW Medicine/Harborview Medical Center have endorsed using droplet, contact, and standard precautions for patients suspected of COVID-19. N95 or PAPRs are STILL REQUIRED for any aerosol generating procedure in a patient suspected of COVID-19. See [http://www.wsha.org/wp-content/uploads/Droplet\\_Contact-Precautions\\_2020.03.04.pdf](http://www.wsha.org/wp-content/uploads/Droplet_Contact-Precautions_2020.03.04.pdf)

Aerosol-generating procedures include but are not limited to: endotracheal intubation, open respiratory and airway suctioning, tracheostomy care, cardiopulmonary resuscitation, sputum induction, bronchoscopy, aerosolized administration of pentamidine or other medications, pulmonary function testing, any procedures that use bone saws/centrifuges/blenders/aspiration equipment. DOH continues to recommend airborne precautions when obtaining nasopharyngeal specimens, but is reconsidering this and may remove it from the list of aerosol-generating procedures.

The CDC has extensive PPE guidance here, including recommendations on how to conserve PPE. Note that the CDC guidance has not yet relaxed to removing airborne precautions when not conducting airborne generating procedures. The World Health Organization has always held to droplet precautions, using airborne precautions when conducting an aerosol-generating procedure.

### Evaluation

CDC has expanded their criteria for Persons Under Investigation (PUI) to a wider group of symptomatic patients. Clinicians should use their judgment to determine if a patient has signs and symptoms compatible with COVID-19 and whether the patient should be tested. Decisions on which patients receive testing should be based on the local epidemiology of COVID-19, as well as the clinical course of illness. Most patients with confirmed COVID-19 have developed fever (can be subjective) and/or symptoms of acute respiratory illness (e.g., cough, difficulty breathing). Clinicians are strongly encouraged to test for other causes of respiratory illness, including infections such as influenza.

If you are suspicious of COVID-19 and are collecting a viral respiratory panel, airborne/droplet/contact/standard precautions ARE recommended when collecting NP swabs.

Any patient suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19 should be provided this handout and instructed to remain under home isolation precautions for 7 days OR until 72 hours after fever is gone and symptoms get better, whichever is longer.

### Testing

Please refer to the DOH document *COVID-19 Testing Information for Healthcare Providers (3/7/20)*  
<https://www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/1600/coronavirus/Interim-2019NovelCoronavirusQuicksheetProviders.pdf>

There are currently no restrictions on who can be tested for COVID-19 and commercial testing is becoming widely available. Healthcare providers may test any patient with symptoms consistent with COVID-19 (e.g., fever, cough, shortness of breath).

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In general, healthcare providers should send specimens for COVID-19 testing to commercial laboratories. Please see each laboratory's test menu for specimen collection instructions, submission forms, and shipping requirements. The Washington

State Insurance Commissioner has ordered all Washington health insurers to waive deductibles and copays for COVID-19 testing.

Specimens from the following patients can be sent to the Washington State Public Health Laboratories with prior review and approval from public health:

- Healthcare workers
- Patients in other public safety occupations (e.g., law enforcement, fire fighter, EMS)
- Patients involved in an illness cluster in a facility or group (e.g., healthcare, school, corrections, business)
- Patients with no health insurance

If seeking testing at the Public Health Laboratories, call the Whatcom County Health Department to discuss the case and for instructions (and assistance if needed) on specimen collection, packaging, and transport to the DOH PHL. If possible, please call 360-778-6100, 8:30 AM – 4:30 PM. PHL will fax its results to the submitter and to WCHD.

If approved by public health for testing, collect two of the following specimens, listed in order of preference. Use airborne precautions (N-95 mask/CAPR/PAPR) when collecting aerosol-generating specimens (e.g. NP swab, induced sputum, etc).

- Nasopharyngeal (NP) swab.
- Sputum or bronchiolar lavage (BAL), if available.
- Oropharyngeal swab, if no sputum or BAL.

Label each sample tube with two patient identifiers and the type of sample (i.e., NP, OP or sputum).

Keep specimens cold after collection and during transport. Regular ice packs are okay.

WCHD will complete one 2019-nCov Sample Submission Form for each sample and fax to DOH PHL as well as provide to include with shipping the specimens.

## **COVID-19 Surveillance and Reporting**

All lab-confirmed COVID-19 infections are reported by labs to DOH, CDC, and local health departments, whether tested through public health or commercial labs. In general, you do not need to report that you are testing a person. However, we ask that you notify us of patients being tested who are hospitalized or have contact with a confirmed case, and not wait for the lab confirmation. You can leave as a non-urgent confidential report on our 24-hour Communicable Disease Report Line, 360-778-6150. If DOH issues more specific notification criteria and requirements, we will update our guidance.

## **Isolation versus Quarantine**

We have been asked for clarification regarding isolation and quarantine. Please review the definitions below.

**Isolation:** Patients WITH symptoms, which a healthcare provider suspects to have or is lab-confirmed for COVID-19. These patients should remain under home isolation precautions for 7 days OR until 72 hours after fever is gone and symptoms get better, whichever is longer.

Patients who have fever with cough or shortness of breath but have not been exposed to someone with COVID-19 and have not tested positive for COVID-19, should stay home away from others until 72 hours after the fever is gone and symptoms get better. (This also applies to patients with mild illness who have not been tested.)

**Quarantine:** Patients WITHOUT symptoms but exposed to confirmed case of COVID-19. These patients are advised to stay home, avoid public places, and to monitor their health for 14 days following the last day they were exposed to the ill

person. If patients do develop symptoms, most will develop mild symptoms in which case patients should stay home and away from other people. If the patient develops symptoms that cannot be managed at home or has high-risk for complications (age 60 years or over, are pregnant or have other medical conditions), they should contact their healthcare provider and tell them they have been exposed. [Handout for patients exposed to COVID but not yet symptomatic]

NOTE that isolation and quarantine are operationally similar for the patient: patients should stay home and avoid public places. If symptoms worsen and cannot be managed at home, patients should call their healthcare provider ahead of coming into the clinic or hospital.

## Resources

WCHD Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) (Health Care Providers page will be updated and expanded soon)

<https://www.whatcomcounty.us/3329/Novel-Coronavirus-COVID-19>

WA Department of Health COVID-19 Resources for Health Care Providers

<https://www.doh.wa.gov/Emergencies/NovelCoronavirusOutbreak2020/HealthcareProviders>

DOH Healthcare Provider Evaluation Tool -- will be updated shortly

<https://www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/1600/Interim-2019NovelCoronavirusQuicksheetProviders.pdf>

## Patient Handouts (Please use these for patients you evaluate)

What to do if you have confirmed or suspected coronavirus disease (COVID-19)

<https://www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/1600/coronavirus/COVIDcasepositive.pdf>

What to do if you were potentially exposed to someone with confirmed coronavirus disease (COVID-19)

<https://www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/1600/coronavirus/COVIDexposed.pdf>

What to do if you have symptoms of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) and have not been around anyone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19

<https://www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/1600/coronavirus/COVIDconcerned.pdf>

Refer patients or other with general questions about COVID-19 to the WA DOH COVID-19 Public Information Call Center at 800-525-0127. Phone lines are currently staffed from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m.

For current situation reports and updated guidance, refer to the CDC and DOH COVID-19 sites:

<https://www.doh.wa.gov/Emergencies/Coronavirus>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>

## For more information, contact:

Whatcom County Health Department Communicable Disease Program

1500 N State Street, Bellingham WA 98225

360-778-6100 Main | 360-778-6150 24-hour Communicable Disease Program Report Line