

This is an official  
**DHEC Health Update**

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## Updated Guidance for COVID-19 Testing and Reporting in South Carolina

### Summary

In order to improve efficiency as more testing is being requested, DHEC is providing updated guidance on the process for testing and reporting COVID-19 in South Carolina. Information to assist in patient evaluation and appropriateness for testing for COVID-19 can be found in the DHEC HANs distributed on March 5, 2020 and March 12, 2020 and available [here](#).

Providers are encouraged to register if not already receiving alerts directly at <https://apps.dhec.sc.gov/Health/SCHANRegistration/>

### Important Updates:

1. Prior approval via DHEC consultation is no longer required for COVID-19 testing at the DHEC Public Health Laboratory (**PHL**).
2. Nasopharyngeal swab (NP) is now the only sample required for testing at the PHL. Oropharyngeal swabs (OP) are no longer needed nor accepted.

### Patient Evaluation and Testing Considerations

1. Providers are responsible for obtaining clinical specimens for COVID-19 and transportation for testing. Specimen collection involves a synthetic swab of nasopharynx (NP) placed in viral transport media (see below). DHEC does not provide specific testing kits for COVID-19 testing.
2. **Test availability:** At this time, testing for COVID-19 is available through the PHL and also private commercial labs. Contact your commercial lab provider to inquire about the availability of testing.
  - For patients seen in an outpatient setting who will be discharged home with recommendations to self-isolate, consider using commercial testing through your existing lab provider as available.
  - For patients who are hospitalized, or for those who are unable to use commercial testing, testing can be performed through the PHL.
    - At this time, the PHL cannot test asymptomatic individuals.

- Please refer to the process outlined below for testing of specimens at the PHL. Calling ahead to DHEC is no longer required for submitting specimens.
3. **Decision to test:** 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. Most patients with confirmed COVID-19 have developed fever and/or symptoms of acute respiratory illness (e.g. cough, difficulty breathing). Rule out of more likely conditions should be done first and could include influenza, strep, and respiratory virus panel testing.

Clinicians must carefully consider which patients they choose to test through the PHL as demand may outpace supply.

**Priorities for testing may include:**

- a. Hospitalized patients who have signs and symptoms compatible with COVID-19.
- b. Other symptomatic individuals such as, older adults and individuals with chronic medical conditions and/or an immunocompromised state that may put them at higher risk for poor outcomes (e.g., diabetes, heart disease, receiving immunosuppressive medications, chronic lung disease, chronic kidney disease).
- c. Any persons including healthcare personnel, who had close contact with a suspect or laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 patient within 14 days of symptom onset, or close contact with an individual who has a history of travel from affected geographic areas within 14 days of symptom onset.

**Infection Control Recommendations for Healthcare Facilities**

Reference: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/infection-control/control-recommendations.html>

Adhere to Standard and Transmission-Based Precautions:

- Healthcare Provider (**HCP**) who enter the room of a patient with known or suspected COVID-19 should adhere to Standard Precautions and use a respirator or facemask, gown, gloves, and eye protection.
- When available, respirators (instead of facemasks) are preferred; they should be prioritized for situations where respiratory protection is most important and the care of patients with pathogens requiring Airborne Precautions (e.g., tuberculosis, measles, varicella).
- HCP should perform hand hygiene before and after all patient contact, contact with potentially infectious material, and before putting on and after removing PPE, including gloves.
- HCP should perform hand hygiene by washing hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or if not available, alcohol-based hand rub with 60-95% alcohol.

**Respiratory Specimen Collection Guidance**

Reference: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/infection-control/control-recommendations.html>

When collecting diagnostic respiratory specimens (e.g., nasopharyngeal swab) from a possible COVID-19 patient, the following should occur:

- HCP in the room should wear an N-95 or higher-level respirator (or facemask if a respirator is not available), eye protection, gloves, and a gown.

- The number of HCP present during the procedure should be limited to only those essential for patient care and procedure support. Visitors should not be present for specimen collection.
- Specimen collection should be performed in a normal examination room with the door closed.
- Cleaning and disinfection of procedure room surfaces must be done promptly as described in the section on environmental infection control in [March 12 HAN](#).

### **Procedure for DHEC PHL COVID-19 Testing**

Please note: Required specimen for COVID-19 testing at the **PHL** now consists of nasopharyngeal swab (NP) specimen **only**. Oropharyngeal (OP) swabs are **not required nor will be accepted**.

1. If your facility/practice is not registered with the PHL, please send an email to [openelis\\_admin@dhec.sc.gov](mailto:openelis_admin@dhec.sc.gov) to get a Customer ID and access to Result Point. These are both **required** prior to sending specimens.
2. Complete the CDC person-under-investigation (PUI) form, which is accessible at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/pui-form.pdf> ([Instructions](#))
3. Scan/email or fax the completed PUI form to the region the patient resides in:
  - Low Country (Allendale, Bamberg, Beaufort, Berkeley, Calhoun, Charleston, Colleton, Dorchester, Hampton, Jasper, Orangeburg): Email to [LowcountryEPI@dhec.sc.gov](mailto:LowcountryEPI@dhec.sc.gov) or Fax 843-953-0051
  - Upstate (Abbeville, Anderson, Cherokee, Greenville, Greenwood, Laurens, McCormick, Oconee, Pickens, Spartanburg, Union): Email to [PUI.upstate@dhec.sc.gov](mailto:PUI.upstate@dhec.sc.gov)
  - Midlands (Aiken, Barnwell, Chester, Edgefield, Fairfield, Kershaw, Lancaster, Lexington, Newberry, Richland, Saluda, York): Email to [whisenrj@dhec.sc.gov](mailto:whisenrj@dhec.sc.gov)
  - Pee Dee (Chesterfield, Clarendon, Darlington, Dillon, Florence, Georgetown, Horry, Lee, Marion, Marlboro, Sumter, Williamsburg): Email to [EpiPeeDee@dhec.sc.gov](mailto:EpiPeeDee@dhec.sc.gov) or Fax to 843-915-6506
4. Complete DHEC lab requisition form DHEC 1335, which can be accessed at <https://www.scdhec.gov/sites/default/files/Library/D-1335.pdf> and ensure the following **mandatory fields** are completed:
  - Patient Name
  - Patient ID Number
  - Date of Birth
  - Sex
  - Sender Address
  - If new sender, please provide contact and fax number
  - Date of Collection and Time
  - Specimen Type/Source: 52 nasopharyngeal swab
  - Under TEST REQUESTED, MOLECULAR SECTION check "Other" and write in COVID-19
5. Collect NP swab from patient.
  - a. Use only synthetic fiber swabs with plastic shafts.
  - b. Place swab immediately into sterile tube containing 2-3 ml of viral transport media.
  - c. Label tube with patient name and date of birth.

- d. Store specimen at 2-8°C for up to 72 hours after collection. If a delay in testing or shipping is expected, store specimens at -70°C or below.

## 6. Specimen transport

- a. If you have an established process/courier for transporting specimens to the **PHL**, use that system.
  - i. On weekdays, facilities can courier specimens to the local health department for transport to the PHL.
  - ii. On weekends, the specimens must be transported directly to the PHL, 8231 Parklane Road, Columbia, SC 29223
  - iii. For after hours or weekend specimen drop-off, courier/volunteer will utilize animal head drop box at the PHL.
- b. If the office has no available courier service or cannot courier directly to the PHL on the weekend, the provider may consider calling the Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) Volunteer Coordinator for their region to inquire on the availability of volunteers to facilitate transport. See below for Volunteer Coordinator for your region

**Upstate MRC Volunteer Coordinator** (for counties: Abbeville, Anderson, Cherokee, Greenville, Greenwood, Laurens, McCormick, Oconee, Pickens, Spartanburg, Union):

- **Joanne Hobbick** - [hobbicjm@dhec.sc.gov](mailto:hobbicjm@dhec.sc.gov) (864) 372-1327 (w) / (864) 202-1405 (c)
- Back up: **Renee Campbell** 864-982-2875 or **Lummie Young** 864-608-5592

**Midlands MRC Volunteer Coordinator** (for counties: Aiken, Barnwell, Chester, Edgefield, Fairfield, Lancaster, Lexington, Kershaw, Newberry, Richland, Saluda, York):

- **Scott Phillips** - [phillist@dhec.sc.gov](mailto:phillist@dhec.sc.gov) (803) 576-2694 (w) / (803) 730-0701 (c)
- Back up: **Karen Hutto** 803-667-1127

**Pee Dee MRC Volunteer Coordinator** (for counties: Clarendon, Chesterfield, Darlington, Dillon, Florence, Georgetown, Horry, Lee, Marion, Marlboro, Sumter, Williamsburg):

- **Jenny Latour** - [latourrj@dhec.sc.gov](mailto:latourrj@dhec.sc.gov) (803) 934-2898 (w) / (843) 331-7575
- Back up: **Ruthie Odom** (843) 250-0704 / (803) 250-0704 / (803) 473-5252

**Lowcountry MRC Volunteer Coordinator** (for Counties: Allendale, Bamberg, Beaufort, Berkeley, Calhoun, Charleston, Colleton, Dorchester, Hampton, Jasper, Orangeburg):

- **Stefanie Roy** - [roysd@dhec.sc.gov](mailto:roysd@dhec.sc.gov) (843) 953-0052 (w) / (843) 513-4350 (c)
- Back up – **Raymond Barteet** (843) 834-0635

## 7. Specimen packaging information

- a. If using Fed Ex to ship, follow IATA guidelines. This sample will be considered Category B.
- b. Ship cold, but not frozen. Use cold packs around the outside of the secondary packaging in an insulated shipper. Do not use ice because it will melt and leak during shipping.
- c. If shipping through a DHEC or another courier, ensure specimen is kept cold and in a biohazard bag or secondary container in the cooler.
- d. Include **2 copies** of lab requisition form (DHEC 1335) and labeled specimen for each patient.

## **Test Results from DHEC Public Health Lab**

All laboratory reports generated are considered confidential information. The reports will be released only to authorized persons. Reports can be accessed via the internet through a secure laboratory web portal (Result Point), this allows instant access to results. Results will be posted approximately 48 hours after the sample is received.

Email [openelis\\_admin@dhec.sc.gov](mailto:openelis_admin@dhec.sc.gov) to get access to Result Point.

Clients can only view information on orders that have been logged in with their customer ID.

Regional epidemiology staff will call providers with positive test results (highest priority calls) and negative test results.

## **Reporting of Positive Results from Commercial Labs**

COVID-19 is now considered **Immediately Reportable** in South Carolina, under the "Novel Infectious Agent" condition in the [2020 South Carolina List of Reportable Conditions](#). When you receive a positive test from a commercial reference lab, please call the regional epidemiology office of the county where the patient resides to report (see contact information below). Epidemiology staff will assist with next steps for case and contact investigation activities.

## **Resources for Additional Information**

- CDC Interim Guidance for Implementing Home Care of People Not Requiring Hospitalization for Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) (updated February 12, 2020) [https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/guidance-home-care.html?CDC\\_AA\\_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fguidance-home-care.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/guidance-home-care.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fguidance-home-care.html)
- CDC Interim Infection Prevention and Control Recommendations for Patients with Suspected or Confirmed Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) in Healthcare Settings (updated March 10, 2020) [https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/infection-control/control-recommendations.html?CDC\\_AA\\_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fhcp%2Finfection-control.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/infection-control/control-recommendations.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fhcp%2Finfection-control.html)
- CDC Interim US Guidance for Risk Assessment and Public Health Management of Healthcare Personnel with Potential Exposure in a Healthcare Setting to Patients with Coronavirus Disease (COVID-10) (updated March 7, 2020) <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/guidance-risk-assesment-hcp.html>

## **DHEC contact information for reportable diseases and reporting requirements**

Reporting of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) as a Novel Infectious Agent is consistent with South Carolina Law requiring the reporting of diseases and conditions to your state or local public health department. (State Law # 44-29-10 and Regulation # 61-20) as per the DHEC 2020 List of Reportable Conditions available at:

<https://www.scdhec.gov/sites/default/files/Library/CR-009025.pdf>

Federal HIPAA legislation allows disclosure of protected health information, without consent of the individual, to public health authorities to collect and receive such information for the purpose of preventing or controlling disease. (HIPAA 45 CFR §164.512).

<b>Regional Public Health Offices – 2020</b>			
Mail or call reports to the Epidemiology Office in each Public Health Region			
<b>MAIL OR FAX TO:</b>			
<b><u>Lowcountry</u></b> Allendale, Bamberg, Beaufort, Berkeley, Calhoun, Charleston, Colleton, Dorchester, Hampton, Jasper, Orangeburg  4050 Bridge View Drive, Suite 600 N. Charleston, SC 29405 Fax: (843) 953-0051	<b><u>Midlands</u></b> Aiken, Barnwell, Chester, Edgefield, Fairfield, Kershaw, Lancaster, Lexington, Newberry, Richland, Saluda, York  2000 Hampton Street Columbia, SC 29204 Fax: (803) 576-2993	<b><u>Pee Dee</u></b> Clarendon, Chesterfield, Darlington, Dillon, Florence, Georgetown, Horry, Lee, Marion, Marlboro, Sumter, Williamsburg  1931 Industrial Park Road Conway, SC 29526 Fax: (843) 915-6502 Fax2: (843) 915-6506	<b><u>Upstate</u></b> Abbeville, Anderson, Cherokee, Greenville, Greenwood, Laurens, McCormick, Oconee, Pickens, Spartanburg, Union  200 University Ridge Greenville, SC 29602 Fax: (864) 282-4373
<b>CALL TO:</b>			
<b><u>Lowcountry</u></b>  Office: (843) 441-1091 Nights/Weekends: (843) 441-1091	<b><u>Midlands</u></b>  Office: (888) 801-1046 Nights/Weekends: (888) 801-1046	<b><u>Pee Dee</u></b>  Office: (843) 915-8886 Nights/Weekends: (843) 915-8845	<b><u>Upstate</u></b>  Office: (864) 372-3133 Nights/Weekends: (864) 423-6648
<b>For information on reportable conditions, see</b> <a href="https://www.scdhec.gov/ReportableConditions">https://www.scdhec.gov/ReportableConditions</a>		<b><u>DHEC Bureau of Communicable Disease Prevention &amp; Control</u></b> <b>Division of Acute Disease Epidemiology</b> 2100 Bull St • Columbia, SC 29201 Phone: (803) 898-0861 • Fax: (803) 898-0897 Nights / Weekends: 1-888-847-0902	

Categories of Health Alert messages:

<b>Health Alert</b>	Conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention.
<b>Health Advisory</b>	Provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action.
<b>Health Update</b>	Provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; unlikely to require immediate action.
<b>Info Service</b>	Provides general information that is not necessarily considered to be of an emergent nature.