



# ALEXANDRIA HEALTH DEPARTMENT

## Communicable Disease Division

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## **HEALTH COMMISSIONER UPDATE, ADDITIONS TO COVID-19 TESTING GUIDANCE, PPE REQUESTS**

**APRIL 7, 2020**

Please find enclosed in this update the Virginia State Health Commissioner COVID-19 update, along with guidance on alternatives to nasopharyngeal (NP) specimens when NP swab collection (preferred) is not possible. This includes the allowance for self- or healthcare worker-collected nasal swab (anterior nares) or nasal mid-turbinate swabs. Please also respond to the survey at the end of this communication if your practice is testing for COVID-19 and needs to make a request for personal protective equipment.

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## COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

### *Department of Health*

COVID-19 Update for Virginia

April 6, 2020

Dear Colleague:

As COVID-19 continues to rapidly evolve, please visit the [VDH website](#) for updated epidemiological information and clinical guidance.

### **COVID-19 in Virginia**

- As community transmission increases in Virginia, healthcare facilities should consider [additional actions](#) to reduce the risk of their employees introducing COVID-19 into their facilities.
- There is [growing evidence](#) of asymptomatic and presymptomatic spread. CDC recently changed the start of the infectious period to 48 hours before symptom onset.
- For people who must leave their home for essential needs (e.g., grocery shopping and picking up pharmacy medications), [CDC recommends that people wear cloth face coverings](#) where other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain, especially in areas of significant community-based transmission. N95 respirators and surgical masks are not recommended in these situations so that they can be reserved for HCP and first responders

- Mildly ill patients may not need to be tested and can be managed at home. Clinical diagnoses of COVID-19 are reportable; given the volume, reporting through the [VDH Online Morbidity Report Portal](#) is preferred. Please continue to call your [local health department](#) about suspected outbreaks of COVID-19.
- For COVID-19 patients, please provide [this patient handout about home isolation](#) and encourage them to notify their contacts.
- A COVID-19 Flag Alert has been added to Virginia's Emergency Department Care Coordination Program. COVID-19 alerts will automatically become inactive after six weeks.
- VDH has updated work restriction recommendations to allow asymptomatic healthcare personnel who have had an exposure to a COVID-19 patient to continue to work after options to improve staffing have been exhausted and in consultation with their occupational health program. More information can be found on the [VDH COVID-19 Healthcare Personnel Risk Assessment Tool](#).

## Testing

- [VDH criteria for COVID-19 public health testing](#) at DCLS have been updated to remove requirements for influenza testing. Until testing is widely available, [prioritizing testing at private labs for high risk groups](#) should also be considered.

## Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

- Virginia continues to experience a critical shortage of PPE. CDC has defined [acceptable alternative PPE](#) for caring for patients with confirmed or suspected COVID-19. Additional shipments from the Strategic National Stockpile are not expected in the near future. For questions, individual practices, home health and CHCs/FQHCs should check with their [local health districts](#). Hospitals and nursing homes should contact their [regional healthcare coalition](#).

## Congregate Settings

- As of April 3, 31 confirmed outbreaks (defined as having two or more COVID-19 cases) have been reported and 12 (39%) are in skilled nursing and assisted living facilities. Answers to frequently asked questions are available on the [VDH website](#) and guidance is on the [CDC website](#).
- Other congregate settings, such as jails, prisons, and behavioral health residential facilities also face the threat of COVID-19 introduction and spread. To date, two (7%) confirmed outbreaks have been reported in correctional facilities. [CDC guidance and resources](#) are available for correctional facilities and detention centers.

Thank you for all your efforts on the front line of combat against the COVID-19 pandemic. You are an essential part of the public health campaign to protect the health of the people of the Commonwealth.

Sincerely,

M. Norman Oliver, MD, MA  
State Health Commissioner

For online access to the letter: <http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/clinicians/covid-19-update-for-virginia/>

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## CDC-Approved Alternatives to Nasopharyngeal Swab Collection:

Revisions were made on March 24, 2020 to reflect the following:

- Allowance for self- or healthcare worker-collected nasal swabs as an acceptable specimen type if NP swab is not possible
- Allowance for self- or healthcare worker-collected nasal turbinate swabs as an acceptable specimen type if NP swab is not possible

## Specimen Type and Priority

All testing for COVID-19 should be conducted in consultation with a healthcare provider. The guidance below addresses options for self-collection of specimens once a clinical determination has been made to pursue COVID-19 testing.

For initial diagnostic testing for COVID-19, CDC recommends collecting and testing an upper respiratory specimen. Nasopharyngeal specimen is the preferred choice for swab-based SARS-CoV-2 testing. When collection of a nasopharyngeal swab is not possible, the following are acceptable alternatives:

- An oropharyngeal (OP) specimen collected by a healthcare professional, or
- A nasal mid-turbinate (NMT) swab collected by a healthcare professional or by onsite self-collection (using a flocked tapered swab), or
- An anterior nares specimen collected by a healthcare professional or by onsite self-collection (using a round foam swab).

For NS, a single polyester swab with a plastic shaft should be used to sample both nares. NS or NMT swabs should be placed in a transport tube containing either viral transport medium, Amies transport medium, or sterile saline.

Source: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/lab/guidelines-clinical-specimens.html>

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## Personal Protective Equipment Request

- Please complete [this survey](#) if your practice is performing outpatient commercial COVID-19 testing. AHD will work to prioritize coordination for PPE distribution to practices providing testing for the community: <https://redcap.vdh.virginia.gov/redcap/surveys/?s=MF9A4DWND3>

## For more information on COVID-19:

[www.cdc.gov/coronavirus](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus)

<https://www.alexandriava.gov/Health>

<http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/surveillance-and-investigation/novel-coronavirus/>

Sincerely,



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