
NEW MEXICO HEALTH ALERT NETWORK (HAN)

ADVISORY

New Mexico Department of Health (NMDOH) updates and clarifies testing criteria for COVID-19

March 10, 2020

Key Points

- COVID-19 cases are increasing across the United States and around the world. We still have no confirmed cases in New Mexico and we are offering testing to all patients with respiratory symptoms (e.g. fever and cough/shortness of breath) who test negative for influenza.
- COVID-19 testing is now available at LabCorp, Quest Diagnostics, and the NMDOH Scientific Laboratory Division (SLD). We anticipate that TriCore will also offer testing to providers by next week. **All COVID-19 testing by SLD must be approved by NMDOH. To coordinate testing at SLD of patients that fit the criteria below, please contact the New Mexico Department of Health at 505-827-0006.** The virus causing COVID-19 is not detected through a routine respiratory panel. Seasonal coronaviruses detected by respiratory panels do not cause COVID-19.
- High-risk patients are those with travel in the prior 14 days to a location with a CDC level 3 or 2 travel health notice due to high levels of community spread (currently China, South Korea, Italy, Iran, and Japan) or contact with a confirmed COVID-19 case. Note: there are currently no domestic locations with CDC travel notices. We request early notification of high-risk patients so that we can expedite testing if needed or assist with home monitoring. **Please contact the New Mexico Department of Health at 505-827-0006.**
- We do not recommend and are not testing persons without symptoms.
- CDC guidelines for evaluating and testing persons for COVID-19 encourage the use of clinical judgment to assess the need for testing. Groups recommended for testing fall within NMDOH criteria for approved testing in the chart below.

Because this is a rapidly changing situation, we recommend that you regularly check the CDC websites on [COVID-19](#) and [Traveler Information](#) for the latest information. We ask that you forward this alert to your colleagues and advise them to subscribe to the New Mexico Health Alert Network to receive public health alerts on COVID-19 detection and infection prevention.

EPIDEMIOLOGY AND RESPONSE

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COVID-19 Testing Criteria as of March 10, 2020

	Clinical Features	AND	Epidemiologic Risk	Testing	Specimens	PPE
High Risk¹	Fever or signs/symptoms of lower respiratory illness (e.g. cough or shortness of breath)	AND	Any person, including healthcare workers who has had close contact with a confirmed COVID-19 patient within 14 days of symptom onset	YES	NP and OP ² swab, sputum if productive cough (do not induce sputum)	Airborne, droplet and contact precautions
	Fever and signs/symptoms of lower respiratory illness (e.g. cough or shortness of breath)	AND	A history of travel from areas with sustained transmission (Level 3 or 2 countries) ³ within 14 days of symptom onset	YES	NP and OP swab, sputum if productive cough (do not induce sputum)	Airborne, droplet and contact precautions
Moderate Risk	Fever with severe acute lower respiratory illness (e.g pneumonia, ARDS) requiring hospitalization without alternative diagnosis (e.g. influenza)	AND	No source of exposure identified	YES	NP and OP swab, and lower respiratory tract specimen (sputum or BAL)	Airborne, droplet and contact precautions
Low Risk	Fever and signs/symptoms of lower respiratory illness (e.g. cough or shortness of breath) with negative influenza test and/or negative PCR respiratory panel	AND	No source of exposure identified	Optional	NP and OP swab if possible. Either NP (preferred) or OP if only one swab can be collected.	Droplet precautions (face mask, eye protection, gloves) hand hygiene

If you have a patient who meets the criteria above contact the New Mexico Department of Health (NMDOH) at 505-827-0006 for approval of testing at SLD.

¹ High risk and Moderate risk: notify NMDOH immediately at 505-827-0006

² NP/OP swab: Use only synthetic fiber swabs with plastic shafts. Do not use calcium alginate swabs or swabs with wooden shafts, as they may contain substances that inactivate some viruses and inhibit PCR testing. **Place swabs immediately into the same sterile tube containing 2-3 ml of viral transport media or universal transport media.** Refrigerate specimen at 2-8°C and ship overnight.

³ Affected areas are defined as geographic regions where sustained community transmission has been identified. Relevant affected areas will be defined as a country with a CDC Level 3 Travel Health Notice (as of 3/10/2020 China, South Korea, Italy and Iran), or a CDC Level 2 Travel Health Notice (as of 3/10/2020: Japan)

If commercial testing is available to you, you do not need approval from NMDOH unless the patient is in the high or moderate risk category.

For more information, consult the [CDC guidance for high risk individuals](#) and [CDC guidance for long term care facilities](#)

Resources

- [New Mexico Department of Health COVID-19 Webpage](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention COVID-19 Webpage](#)
- [Interim Guidance for Healthcare Professionals](#)
- **New Mexico Health Alert Network:** To register for the New Mexico Health Alert Network, go to <https://member.everbridge.net/index/453003085613008#/login> and click “Sign Up” at the bottom of the page. Provide all information on each screen, click on “Save and Continue,” and click on “Finish” at the end to begin receiving important health alerts and advisories.