



Steve Bullock, Governor

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Information for Montana Health Care Providers on COVID-19 Testing

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Montana is aggressively working to contain the spread of COVID-19. Testing of symptomatic patients suspected of COVID-19 is critical to contain the spread in your community. Montana is currently not in the same situation as other states, such as California, New York, or Washington, which have moved from containment to mitigation strategies. As of today, Montana healthcare providers and local and state public health officials continue to work diligently to limit the spread of COVID 19. Therefore, we are asking you to test patients who have symptoms that are consistent with COVID-19.

Who should be tested?

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. Influenza is still circulating, and we highly recommend patients are tested for influenza. Patients with COVID-19 may experience fever and/or symptoms of acute respiratory illness (e.g., cough, difficulty breathing). Notify local public health of all suspected COVID-19 patients per your usual channels. Working together we can help prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus in our communities.

Patients with suspected COVID-19 (whether testing or not) who do not require hospitalization should be isolated at home until one of two sets of criteria are met:

- At least 72 hours have passed since resolution of fever without antipyretics, the respiratory symptoms are improved, and at least 7 days have passed since the onset of symptoms; **OR**
- There is resolution of fever without antipyretics, the respiratory symptoms are improved, and there are at least two consecutive negative nasopharyngeal swabs collected \geq 24 hours apart.

Local public health staff will aggressively work to identify contacts of positive COVID-19 cases and will require those contacts to quarantine for 14 days and monitor themselves for symptoms.

Laboratory testing capacity

Currently, the Montana Public Health Laboratory (MPHL) has test kits, and more are arriving from the CDC. Also, COVID-19 testing is available at many private labs. **The MPHL has not met capacity and has been able to run every test we have received each day.** However, with increasing testing we suspect capacity will be met. DPHHS will use the following guidelines to prioritize the test in to three tiers: Priority 1 (high), Priority 2 (moderate), Priority 3 (low). For testing that will not change clinical care, one may want to send those tests to a high throughput, high capacity reference laboratory (LabCorp, Quest, ARUP, etc.) for timely testing.

In addition, we realize the shortage of viral transport media. The FDA has issued guidance regarding alternative transport systems. This includes Liquid-Amies-based transport media and dry swabs placed in saline. These two alternative transport systems are acceptable at the MPHL and have been approved

for use with the CDC EUA assay. Please click the following link for more information. <https://www.fda.gov/medical-devices/emergency-situations-medical-devices/faqs-diagnostic-testing-sars-cov-2#troubleobtainingviraltransport>. Another option to help stretch resources of transport media, DPHHS has suggested to providers who use the 3 ml viral transport medium, they can aseptically remove 1 ml from the 3 ml tube and transfer it to a similar sterile tube. 1 ml is the minimum amount the state laboratory requests for testing.

DPHHS testing priorities

Priority 1 (High):

- Hospitalized patients who have signs and symptoms compatible with COVID-19.
- Symptomatic high-risk individuals, such as older adults (age \geq 65 years) 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).
- Healthcare workers who have signs and symptoms compatible with COVID-19.
- First responders, such as law enforcement, EMS, and child abuse and neglect first responders, who have signs and symptoms compatible with COVID-19.

These specimens will be processed and tested as quickly as possible in order to inform decisions related to patient care and infection control.

Priority 2 (Moderate):

- Individuals who within 14 days of symptom onset had close contact with a suspect or laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 patient, or who have a history of travel from affected geographic areas within 14 days of their symptom onset.
- Individuals who have respiratory illness, for which flu or an alternate etiology has been ruled out.

Priority 3 (Low):

- Asymptomatic individuals with confirmed contact with a case. These individuals do not need testing and should be in quarantine. If patient in quarantine develops symptoms, testing should occur.
- Asymptomatic individuals who have traveled from an area of known community spread of COVID-19. These individuals do not need testing and likely should be in quarantine. If patient in quarantine develops symptoms, testing should occur.

Thank you once again for all that you are doing to help keep Montana healthy and safe.