

March 12, 2020

To: Placer County Outpatient Health Care Facilities and Providers

From: Dr. Aimee Sisson, Health Officer and Public Health Director

Subject: Testing of Patients with COVID-19 Symptoms

As of today, there are 8 cases of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) in Placer County. On March 10, Placer County Public Health announced that community transmission of COVID-19 is occurring in Placer County and transitioned from a containment strategy focused on identifying, isolating, and tracing contacts for all confirmed cases of COVID-19 to a mitigation strategy aimed at slowing the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus that causes COVID-19. Because SARS-CoV-2 is now circulating in the Placer community and the greater Sacramento region, more cases of COVID-19 are expected in the coming days.

Testing for COVID-19 was previously only available through public health laboratories and had to be authorized by the health officer in the patient's county of residence. However, as of March 9, testing for COVID-19 is available through commercial laboratories. Health officer authorization is NOT required for COVID-19 testing using a commercial laboratory.

Placer County Public Health will continue to play a role in authorizing COVID-19 testing at public health laboratories as outlined in a memo dated March 7, 2020 regarding Public Health COVID-19 Laboratory Testing. Outside of close contacts, health care workers and emergency responders, severely ill hospitalized persons, and persons in congregate living settings, testing for COVID-19 should be done at a commercial laboratory. Public health lab test results are typically available within 24-48 hours, whereas commercial testing will at least initially take longer.

Placer County Public Health has received numerous calls from county residents to report symptoms of and request testing for COVID-19. These callers state that their provider instructed them to call the health department. While I understand that COVID-19 is unfamiliar to many providers, COVID-19 is now being

transmitted in the Placer community and the time to become familiar with the disease is now. **Health care providers have a responsibility to care for patients who are suspected of having COVID-19. It is not appropriate to direct symptomatic patients to call Placer County Public Health to discuss their health concerns. Placer County Public Health staff and the health officer are available for consultation with providers, but not with patients themselves. To consult with Placer County Public Health about a patient you suspect may have COVID-19, please call (530) 886-5310.**

Now that testing is available through commercial labs, you should expect numerous requests from patients for such testing. There are several things to consider as it relates to the evaluation and testing of persons suspected of having COVID-19 in the outpatient setting:

- Now that there is community transmission of COVID-19 in Placer County, a history of international travel is no longer a reliable screening criterion. Expect to see COVID-19 in individuals who have no travel history.
- COVID-19 typically causes fever and cough, but symptoms may also include sore throat, runny nose or nasal congestion, muscle aches, headache, fatigue, vomiting, or diarrhea. Fever is not a sensitive indicator of COVID-19; in a large study in China, only 44% of hospitalized patients had a fever on admission, although 89% experienced fever during their hospitalization.
- Before ordering testing, consider how it will affect your management of the patient. There is no approved treatment for COVID-19.
 - Approximately 80% of COVID-19 infections are mild. Most of these can be managed at home with over-the-counter medicines. Testing to confirm a COVID-19 diagnosis is not necessary in the setting of mild illness.
 - Rule out other common causes of the patient's symptoms before sending COVID-19 specimens for testing. This should include rapid testing for influenza and could include testing for other respiratory pathogens.
- Specimen collection for COVID-19 can be done in the outpatient setting, but must be implemented thoughtfully in order to minimize exposure of health care personnel and other patients to individuals with respiratory symptoms who may have COVID-19.

- The personal protective equipment required for care of patients suspected of having COVID-19 includes gown, gloves, N95 or better respirator, and eye protection. N95 respirators should only be worn by health care workers who have been properly fit-tested as part of respiratory protection program. If you do not currently have a respiratory protection program in your clinic, consider starting one immediately and fit-testing health care workers.
- Oropharyngeal and nasopharyngeal specimens are required for COVID-19 testing. Both swabs can now be placed in the same vial.
- Collection of NP and OP specimens is not considered an aerosol-generating procedure and can be performed in any private examination room with the door closed if an Airborne Infection Isolation Room (AIIR) is not available.
- Do not induce sputum for testing. Sputum induction is an aerosol-generating procedure and should not be performed. Any [aerosol-generating procedure](#) in a patient suspected of having COVID-19 (e.g., nebulizer treatments), should be conducted in an AIIR.
- Develop a protocol to minimize the number of other patients and health care workers exposed to patients with suspected COVID-19. This might include asking patients with respiratory symptoms to call ahead or check in online and wait in their car until they can be roomed directly, or using telehealth visits paired with drive-up specimen collection, or similar solutions.
- COVID-19 is now a reportable illness in California per CCR Title 17 Section 2505. All cases of COVID-19 must be reported to the health officer in the patient's county of residence within one hour by telephone and through the Electronic Laboratory Reporting system.

For additional information on COVID-19, please visit the CDC's coronavirus webpage at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/>, and Placer County's coronavirus webpage at <https://www.placer.ca.gov/coronavirus>.



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