

April 30, 2020

To: Placer County Health Care Providers

From: Aimee Sisson, MD, MPH, Health Officer

Subject: Testing for COVID-19 in Mildly Symptomatic Individuals

This memo updates guidance issued by the Placer County Health Officer on March 12 in a memo titled "Testing of Patients with COVID-19 Symptoms." This previous guidance stated, "Testing to confirm a COVID-19 diagnosis is not necessary in the setting of mild illness" and was based in part on extremely limited testing capacity at the time.

Much has changed since March 12. Laboratory testing capacity for SARS-CoV-2 has improved tremendously with the introduction and expansion of commercial testing, hospital laboratory testing, and point-of-care testing, in addition to the previously available public health laboratory testing. Specimen collection kits (swabs and transport media) are more readily available. Drive-up and drive-through specimen collection sites are available within or near Placer County. Next week, two large walk-in sites each capable of collecting 132 specimens per day will open. Health care facilities have implemented infection control practices that protect health care workers and other patients from COVID-19 during patient visits.

Another big change since the previous memo has been a transition from containment efforts to stop the coronavirus to mitigation efforts to slow the virus' spread. Since issuing a shelter-in-place directive for all Placer County residents on March 19, we have employed the most powerful mitigation measure available. Sheltering in place has been effective in slowing the spread of coronavirus, but at tremendous economic and social cost, such that sheltering in place until a vaccine becomes available is not a viable option. While it is not yet safe to relax shelter-in-place orders and transition to the next control phase, suppression, we must begin implementing testing protocols that will be necessary to stop viral spread during the forthcoming suppression phase.

To that end, **I now recommend providers begin testing for the SARS-CoV-2 virus in individuals with any symptoms consistent with COVID-19, including only mild symptoms.** The ability to identify all individuals with SARS-CoV-2 infection and isolate them from others will be absolutely critical to control spread of

coronavirus once shelter-in-place orders are relaxed. When Californians return to being active in their communities, it will no longer be adequate to ask mildly symptomatic persons to stay home and care for themselves without being tested for coronavirus. Testing capacity has expanded enough to accommodate the testing of all symptomatic persons at this time.

During the forthcoming suppression phase, all persons who test positive for SARS-CoV-2 will be interviewed by Public Health to determine anyone with whom they came into close contact. All close contacts will need to be tested for coronavirus, whether they have symptoms or not, and either isolated (if symptomatic) or quarantined (if asymptomatic). Testing of asymptomatic contacts is necessary because we now know that people are able to transmit SARS-CoV-2 at least 2 days before developing symptoms, and many infected persons may never develop symptoms but could be able to transmit the virus. Testing of close contacts will be guided by Public Health, but specimens will be collected by community providers in most cases.

To begin ramping up for the expanded testing that will be required during the suppression phase, I am requesting that providers begin expanded testing of all symptomatic persons effective immediately. If your usual testing laboratory is not able to process the increased specimen volume resulting from implementation of this guidance, consider utilizing the following options, if you are not doing so already:

- Commercial testing through Quest or LabCorp
- Public health laboratory testing through Placer County Public Health. Up to 25 specimen collection kits at a time for public health lab testing can be obtained by contacting PlacerPHEP@placer.ca.gov.

This guidance may change as the coronavirus situation evolves; I will provide updates as indicated.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Aimee Sisson".

Aimee Sisson, MD, MPH
Health Officer and Public Health Director
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