

TO: Vermont Health Care Providers
FROM: Mark Levine, MD, Health Commissioner

**COVID-19 Diagnostic Anterior Nares Testing:
Prioritization and Specimen Collection**

This Health Update supplements the following Health Advisories:

- [April 21, 2020: Novel Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): Updated Guidance for Testing in Pediatric Patients](#)
- [March 27, 2020: Updated on COVID-19 Diagnostic Testing in Vermont](#)
- [March 20, 2020: COVID-19: Laboratory Testing Process Update](#)
- [March 14, 2020: COVID-19 Diagnostic Testing in Vermont](#)
- [March 6, 2020: Laboratory Testing for Novel Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)

Background:

The Vermont Department of Health and the University of Vermont Medical Center (UVMCMC) continue to work together to establish a reliable supply of testing equipment and supplies for each type of COVID-19 diagnostic test. Currently, there is a shortage of materials for anterior nares testing with an uncertain stockpile chain. This Health Advisory provides guidance to clinicians collecting COVID-19 test specimens from the anterior nares of symptomatic and asymptomatic people.

Clinicians should continue to refer their ambulatory patients to centralized testing sites such as hospitals, associated test centers and local Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs), rather than collecting samples at their practices, in order to conserve personal protective equipment (PPE). Exceptions to this can be made on an individual basis.

Requested Actions:

- **Patients who meet the following criteria should receive priority for anterior nares testing for COVID-19:**
 - Children under the age of 16
 - Patients at increased risk of bleeding (e.g. thrombocytopenia, anticoagulated) or complications (e.g., neutropenia)
 - Patients with nasal anatomic abnormalities (e.g. polyps, deviated septum)
 - People who will require frequent, repeat testing (e.g. employees or residents of skilled nursing facilities)
 - Those without the cognitive ability to understand the testing procedure (e.g. people in memory care or people with dementia)

- **Refer patients to centralized testing sites or order specimen collection kits for anterior nares specimens by contacting Vermont Department of Health Laboratory.** Request kits through the [PPE ordering website](#). Orders are checked and fulfilled daily. While a kit may be obtained from the Health Department Laboratory, the specimen may be tested at UVMHC, Mayo or the Health Department Laboratory.
 - **To submit specimens,** send samples to the University of Vermont Medical Center Laboratory for triage. Specimens from certain groups may be prioritized (e.g. long-term care facility residents, people who are incarcerated, patients who are hospitalized).
- **Follow proper anterior nares specimen collection procedure** for providers who are able to safely perform test collection at their practices with appropriate PPE:
 - Using a flocked or spun polyester swab, insert the swab at least 1 cm (0.5 inch) inside each nostril and firmly sample the nasal membrane by rotating the swab and leaving in place for 10 to 15 seconds in each nostril. Sample both nostrils with the same swab.
- **Consider offering the option of self-collection** of the anterior nares sample under clinician observation for patients with the capacity to self-test.
- **Follow guidelines for collecting and handling specimens safely.** For providers collecting specimens or those who are within 6 feet of patients suspected to be infected with SARS-CoV-2, maintain proper infection control and use recommended personal protective equipment (PPE), which includes an N95 or higher-level respirator (or facemask if a respirator is not available), eye protection, gloves, and a gown, when collecting specimens. PPE use can be minimized through patient self-collection while the healthcare provider maintains at least 6 feet of separation. For providers who are handling specimens, but are not directly involved in collection (e.g. self-collection) and not working within 6 feet of the patient, follow Standard Precautions; gloves are recommended.

If you have any questions, please contact the HAN Coordinator at 802-859-5900 or vthan@vermont.gov.

HAN Message Type Definitions

Health Alert: Conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention.

Health Advisory: Provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action.

Health Update: Provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; unlikely to require immediate action.

Info Service Message: Provides general correspondence from VDH, which is not necessarily considered to be of an emergent nature.