

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

**Novel Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19): Guidance on Ordering Testing for Patients
Prior to Discharge from Emergency Departments
to Inpatient Psychiatric Care Settings**

Background:

Inpatient psychiatry units are particularly vulnerable to COVID-19. For this reason, COVID-19 testing is recommended prior to admission to an inpatient psychiatry unit.

The guidance provided here does not assure provision of resources from the Vermont Department of Health.

**Requested Actions – Testing for Admission to Inpatient Mental Health Settings from an
Emergency Department:**

- 1. Order testing for COVID-19 for patients discharged from an Emergency Department to any inpatient setting in mental health.** It is recommended that all patients discharged from an emergency department to a psychiatric inpatient unit are tested for COVID-19 before discharge and that the test result is known prior to admission to the new facility.

Patients from congregate living settings or inpatient psychiatric units who are evaluated and stabilized in an emergency department for issues unrelated to COVID-19 may be returned to the same facility without a test for COVID-19.

- 2. Label specimens appropriately to facilitate expedited testing for those seeking inpatient mental health treatment.** The Department of Mental Health (DMH), in collaboration with the Health Department and the University of Vermont Medical Center (UVMCC), has established a process to secure expedited testing for people presenting in emergency departments and being referred to inpatient psychiatric treatment settings.
 - a. For voluntary patients,** label test kits with “**High Priority, Send to Health Lab**” to receive expedited testing through the Health Department Laboratory. Test results from the Health Department Laboratory are typically available within 24-48 hours. Every effort is made to make high priority test results available within 24 hours, but it is not always possible.
 - b. For involuntary patients,** complete COVID-19 testing prior to admission to a psychiatric unit. Specimens should be labeled “**ED patient waiting for an admission**” so that it is routed to the UVMCC laboratory for testing.

For specimens from involuntary patients, DMH will work closely with each emergency department and associated clinical lab to ensure reliable access to courier services to expedite sample testing. If the regularly scheduled courier is not scheduled to arrive within 2 hours of acquiring the sample, a STAT transport should be ordered by the hospital by contacting the UVMCC customer service phone number 802-847- 5121. The requesting hospital shall also notify DMH of the STAT courier being ordered by calling the Vermont Psychiatric Care Hospital Admissions office at 802-828-2799 for tracking purposes.

- 3. In circumstances where the patient refuses COVID-19 testing prior to admission to an inpatient psychiatric setting, take the following actions:**
- a. Every therapeutic effort should be made to communicate with the individual the importance of accepting a COVID-19 test.
 - b. If the patient is not symptomatic, their whereabouts prior to admission to the emergency department are known and can be verified, and the accepting facility feels they can safely manage the person, they may be considered for admission by an inpatient facility with adequate medical supports.
 - c. If the patient is not symptomatic and their whereabouts prior to admission to the emergency department are **not** known, and after efforts to acquire a COVID-19 test sample have not been successful, DMH will coordinate a meeting of all the Designated Hospitals, those that have inpatient psychiatric units, to discuss the level of risk and what is needed to facilitate the admission.

DMH through its internal review and other legal consultation does not believe there is legal authority to involuntarily test an individual for COVID-19.

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.