



**This is an official
MS Health Alert Network (HAN) Alert**

MESSAGE ID: MSHAN-2020311-00431-ALT (Health Alert)
RECIPIENTS: All Physicians, Hospitals, ERs, ICPs, NPs, and Healthcare Providers - Statewide
DATE: Wednesday, March 11, 2020
SUBJECT: COVID-19 Testing at the Public Health Laboratory NO LONGER REQUIRES PRIOR APPROVAL FROM MSDH Mississippi March 11, 2020

This guidance supersedes previous guidance and recommendations provided in the MSDH Health Alert dated March 10, 2020.

- The process for submitting tests for COVID-19 to the Mississippi Public Health Laboratory (MPHL) is being streamlined.
- MPHL has the necessary testing capacity to support the state’s COVID-19 response and MPHL is actively performing testing to identify cases in Mississippi.
- COVID-19 testing is also becoming available at several commercial laboratories through an FDA Emergency Use Authorization.

What’s Changed

- **Prior approval from MSDH for submission of samples to the Mississippi Public Health Laboratory is no longer required (see the Mississippi Public Health Laboratory Testing Priorities below).**
- **CDC has issued Updated Healthcare Professionals Infection Control Guidance (see below).**

COVID-19 Testing Priorities at the Mississippi Public Health Laboratory*

Patients with COVID-19 have presented with fever and/or symptoms of acute respiratory illness (e.g., cough, difficulty breathing).

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patients, including healthcare personnel, 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 (see https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html) within 14 days of their symptom onset. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hospitalized patients who have signs and symptoms compatible with COVID-19 (and without alternative explanatory diagnosis (e.g., influenza)). |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other symptomatic individuals at higher risk for poor outcomes, including those who are ≥ 65 years, immunocompromised or have chronic medical conditions (e.g., diabetes, heart disease, receiving immunosuppressive medications, chronic lung disease, chronic kidney disease). |



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*For patients who do not meet the above priorities, clinicians may also elect to submit samples to a commercial laboratory for SARS-CoV-2 testing. Submission of samples to the public health laboratory or to commercial laboratories does not require prior approval from MSDH.

Infection Control

Physicians and providers should immediately implement recommended infection prevention and control practices when suspecting COVID-19. CDC has updated PPE recommendations for the care of patients with known or suspected COVID-19: **facemasks are an acceptable alternative when the supply chain of respirators (N-95) cannot meet the demand. Respirators should be prioritized for procedures likely to generate aerosol.** See [Interim Infection Prevention and Control Recommendations for Patients with Suspected or Confirmed Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) in Healthcare Settings](#)

Steps for Sample Submission to the Mississippi Public Health Laboratory

1. Review the [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Specimen Collection and Shipping Guidance](#). **NOTE: Both an NP specimen using a synthetic swab and a separate OP specimen using a synthetic swab must be collected. NP and OP swabs may be placed in separate vials of viral transport media or both can be placed in a single vial.**
2. Complete the [SARS-CoV-2 \(COVID-19\) Testing Requisition](#)
3. Review the [Guidelines for Shipping Clinical Specimens Classified as Biological Substance](#)
4. Packaged specimens can be dropped off directly at the MPHL Monday-Friday, 8am-4:30 pm, or at a local MSDH clinic in accordance with business hours.
 - Contact your local MSDH clinic prior to dropping off a specimen to confirm the clinic's hours of operation.
 - If an alternate MSDH drop-off location is required, contact the MSDH Office of Field Services at 601-576-7951 for assistance.

Please call the MSDH Office of Epidemiology with questions at 601-576-7725 (601-576-7400 after hours, holidays and weekends).

Paul Byers, MD
State Epidemiologist



Alerting Message Specification Settings

Originating Agency: Mississippi State Department of Health
Alerting Program: MS Health Alert Network (MS HAN)
Message Identifier: MSHAN-2020311-00431-ALT
Program (HAN) Type: Health Alert
Status (Type): Actual ()
Message Type: Alert
Reference: MSHAN-00431
Severity: Unknown
Acknowledgement: No
Sensitive: Not Sensitive
Message Expiration: Undetermined
Urgency: Undetermined
Delivery Time: 600 minutes

Definition of Alerting Vocabulary and Message Specification Settings

Originating Agency: A unique identifier for the agency originating the alert.

Alerting Program: The program sending the alert or engaging in alerts and communications using PHIN Communication and Alerting (PCA) as a vehicle for their delivery.

Message Identifier: A unique alert identifier that is generated upon alert activation (MSHAN-yyymmdd-hhmm-TTT (**ALT=Health Alert**, **ADV=Health Advisory**, **UPD=Health Update**, **MSG/INFO=Message/Info Service**)).

Program (HAN) Type: Categories of Health Alert Messages.

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.

Health Info Service: Provides Message / Notification of general public health information; unlikely to require immediate action.

Status (Type):

Actual: Communication or alert refers to a live event

Exercise: Designated recipients must respond to the communication or alert

Test: Communication or alert is related to a technical, system test and should be disregarded



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Message Type:

- Alert: Indicates an original Alert
- Update: Indicates prior alert has been Updated and/or superseded
- Cancel: Indicates prior alert has been cancelled
- Error: Indicates prior alert has been retracted

Reference: For a communication or alert with a Message Type of “Update” or “Cancel”, this attribute contains the unique Message Identifier of the original communication or alert being updated or cancelled. “n/a” = Not Applicable.

Severity:

- Extreme: Extraordinary threat to life or property
- Severe: Significant threat to life or property
- Moderate: Possible threat to life or property
- Minor: Minimal threat to life or property
- Unknown: Unknown threat to life or property

Acknowledgement: Indicates whether an acknowledgement on the part of the recipient is required to confirm that the alert was received, and the timeframe in which a response is required (Yes or No).

Sensitive:

- Sensitive: Indicates the alert contains sensitive content
- Not Sensitive: Indicates non-sensitive content

Message Expiration: Undetermined.

Urgency: Undetermined. Responsive action should be taken immediately.

Delivery Time: Indicates the timeframe for delivery of the alert (15, 60, 1440, 4320 minutes (.25, 1, 24, 72 hours)).