



COVID-19 Testing for City of Berkeley residents at the Alameda County Public Health Laboratory: Test request, prioritization, specimen collection, and shipping procedures

Updated 04/01/2020

On March 4, 2020 the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) expanded criteria for COVID-19 testing (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/hcp/clinical-criteria.html>). Commercial and other clinical laboratories have begun to offer testing, but access to these testing services may differ by health system and laboratory service provider.

Although clinicians may order the COVID-19 PCR test on any patient for whom they believe it is clinically indicated, the City of Berkeley Communicable Disease Prevention and Control Program (COB-CDPCP) will focus public health testing on patients with **fever and acute lower respiratory illness (cough or dyspnea) that are in one of the following highest priority groups:**

- Health care personnel (HCP)
- Staff or patients, residents and participants in skilled nursing facilities (SNF), Residential Care Facilities for the Elderly (RCFE), or Adult Day Health (ADH) programs, shelter or other congregate settings
- Correctional Facility inmates and staff
- Residents and staff of residential alcohol and drug rehab treatment facilities
- Older adults (>65) and individuals with chronic medical conditions
- Hospitalized patients, if results would inform decisions related to infection control or medical management
- Emergency response personnel (e.g. law enforcement, fire fighters) who are assigned to work in the field

For patients with suspected COVID-19:

1. **Immediately institute COVID-19 infection control precautions.** Place a surgical mask on the patient and place the patient in an airborne infection isolation room if possible. If not, place them private room with the door closed and signage indicating airborne, contact, and standard precautions with eye protection should be used. Do not allow the patient to wait in a waiting room.
2. **The patient history and clinical examination and collect specimens if COVID-19 is clinically suspected.** As of 3/12/2020, CDC has advised that only a nasopharyngeal (NP) swab is required for tests performed using the CDC's assay, which is the assay used by Alameda County Public Health Laboratory (ACPHL). Place the NP swab in a specimen vial containing Viral Transport Media (VTM) or Universal Transport Media (VTM). Only collect sputum if the patient can spontaneously cough up a deep sputum sample, and do not perform sputum induction. If the patient is intubated, you may collect a tracheal aspirate. Lower respiratory tract specimens cannot be tested at ACPHL so the testing turnaround time for these specimens will be longer. Do not collect serum.
3. **Label the specimens completely.** Incomplete or incorrect labeling will delay testing and may result in cancellation of testing. Write on the specimen vial:
 - Patient name
 - Date of collection
 - Specimen type – for NP swab, write "NP"



4. **Complete [ACPHL specimen submittal forms](#), one for each specimen.** Incomplete specimen submittal forms will delay result reporting. Required fields:
 - Patient name, date of birth, sex
 - Patient address
 - Ordering clinician name and telephone number
 - Submitting laboratory name, address, phone number and fax number
 - Specimen collection date and time
 - Specimen source
 - Test name, COVID 19 PCR
 - **See Specimen Collection, Packaging, and Shipping section for details on sending the specimen to the ACPHL.**

5. **Complete the CDC's COVID-19 Person Under Investigation form if testing is requested from COB-CDPCP at ACPHL.** Download from <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/pui-form.pdf>. **Write on the form (or in the email) whether patient fits into one of the COB-CDPCP highest priority groups, and if so, which.** Send this form, along with the Specimen Submittal Form to COB-CDPCP for review and prioritization. Fax to 510-981-5345 OR securely email to COBCD@cityofberkeley.info. If emailing, put in the subject line, Request for COVID-19 testing.

6. **Advise patient to self-isolate until results return.** Please provide a few surgical masks to the patient in case they have to return to a health care setting, and provide home isolation instructions available at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/guidance-prevent-spread.html>.

7. **Test turnaround time at ACPHL is currently one to two business days** from the time specimens are received for specimens from patients in the highest priority groups. This may change depending on testing volume. Results will be sent to your healthcare facility. Specimens from lower priority groups may be frozen and tested at a later date. **Please do not call the ACPHL or COB-CDPCP for results. They may only release them to the ordering lab and provider.**

8. **Please limit phone calls to COB-CDPCP to reporting only individuals who clearly meet COB-CDPCP's highest priority groups for testing.** This will allow us to focus on testing the highest risk individuals and tracing and quarantining of contacts to confirmed and high suspect cases.



Specimen Collection, Packaging, and Shipping

Maintain proper infection control when collecting specimens: use standard, contact and airborne precautions along with eye protection (goggles/face shields).

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) changed its guidance on 3/12/2020 to collect only a NP swab. Lower respiratory tract specimens may be submitted but only if clinically indicated and must be sent to the CDC for testing. Do not send serum or other specimen types.

Respiratory Specimens

- A. Upper respiratory tract
- **Nasopharyngeal swabs (NP):** Use only synthetic fiber swabs with plastic or aluminum shafts. Do not use calcium alginate swabs or swabs with wooden shafts, as they may contain substances that inactivate some viruses and inhibit PCR testing. Place swab immediately into sterile tubes containing 2-3 ml of viral transport media or universal transport media.
 - **NP specimen should be placed in a vial clearly marked with patient name, date of collection, specimen type (“NP”). Failure to label specimens completely will result in testing delays or cancellation.**
 - Nasopharyngeal swab: Insert a swab into the nostril parallel to the palate. Leave the swab in place for a few seconds to absorb secretions. Swab both nasopharyngeal areas with the same swab.
 - Nasopharyngeal wash/aspirate or nasal aspirate: Collect 2-3 mL into a sterile, leak-proof, screw-cap sputum collection cup or sterile dry container. Refrigerate specimen at 2-8°C.
- B. Lower respiratory tract, only if clinically indicated and sample available (eg, productive cough, intubation)
- Bronchoalveolar lavage, tracheal aspirate (only if bronchoscopy is clinically indicated or if patient requires intubation): Collect 2-3 mL into a sterile, leak-proof, screw-cap sputum collection cup or sterile dry container. Refrigerate specimen at 2-8°C.
 - Sputum: Sputum induction is not recommended. Have the patient rinse the mouth with water and expectorate deep cough sputum directly into a sterile, leak-proof, screw-cap sputum collection cup or sterile dry container. Refrigerate specimen at 2-8°C.

Specimen submittal forms

An [ACPHL specimen submittal form](#) must be completed for each specimen and accompany the specimens to the ACPHL. Incomplete specimen submittal forms will result in delayed result reporting. Required fields:

- Patient name, date of birth, sex
- Patient address
- Ordering clinician name and telephone number
- Submitting laboratory name, address, phone number and fax number
- Specimen collection date and time
- Specimen source
- Test name, COVID 19 PCR
- See Specimen Collection, Packaging, and Shipping section for details on sending the specimen to the ACPHL.



Health, Housing & Community Services Department
Public Health Officer Unit
Communicable Disease Prevention and Control Program

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Packaging and Shipping to ACPHL

- Specimen containers should be securely sealed and closed, parafilm wrapped around the caps, and placed in a zip lock (ACPHL) specimen bag with an absorbent pad inside, large enough to soak up volume of container contents. The bag must be completely zipped shut and placed in a secondary container that should be metal or plastic if possible.
- **If possible**, package according to Category B, UN 3373 shipping standards. Place in appropriate box, or a bag if no box is available. Place a cold pack inside the box if possible. Address the box/bag to: **Alameda County Public Health Laboratory, 2901 Peralta Oaks Court, 2nd floor, Oakland, CA 94605**. Store box/package at refrigerator temp (2-8°C) until courier arrives and throughout transit to ACPHL. Unfortunately, due to high volumes of testing requests, COB-CDPCP is no longer able to provide expedited courier services for transporting COVID-19 specimens to ACPHL. **ACPHL can accept specimens Monday through Friday, 8:30 am to 5 pm.**