

This document has been archived. Please refer to the [COVID-19 HAN SUMMARY](#) for updated information on the topic.



DATE:	3/5/2020
TO:	Health Alert Network
FROM:	Rachel Levine, MD, Secretary of Health
SUBJECT:	Interim Guidance for Healthcare Professionals
DISTRIBUTION:	Statewide
LOCATION:	n/a
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COUNTY:	n/a
MUNICIPALITY:	n/a
ZIP CODE:	n/a

This transmission is a “Health Alert”: conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention.

HOSPITALS: PLEASE SHARE WITH ALL MEDICAL, PEDIATRIC, NURSING AND LABORATORY STAFF IN YOUR HOSPITAL; **EMS COUNCILS:** PLEASE DISTRIBUTE AS APPROPRIATE; **FQHCs:** PLEASE DISTRIBUTE AS APPROPRIATE **LOCAL HEALTH JURISDICTIONS:** PLEASE DISTRIBUTE AS APPROPRIATE; **PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS:** PLEASE DISTRIBUTE TO YOUR MEMBERSHIP; **LONG-TERM CARE FACILITIES:** PLEASE SHARE WITH ALL MEDICAL, INFECTION CONTROL, AND NURSING STAFF IN YOUR FACILITY

The Pennsylvania Department of Health (DOH) is releasing the following guidance for healthcare professionals with potential exposure to patients with 2019 novel coronavirus and for health departments to implement after-travel health precautions.

- CDC and DOH have updated criteria for PUI for COVID-19
- **As of 3/5/2020, COVID-19 cases caused by the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) have NOT been detected within Pennsylvania**
- **Health care providers should contact DOH at 1-877-PA-HEALTH (1-877-724-3258) or local health department about possible cases of COVID-19**
- With the increased availability of diagnostic testing for COVID-19 at the state level, clinical providers and health departments should discuss testing for patients with compatible symptoms and exposure criteria, and taking into account the epidemiology of COVID-19 in Pennsylvania
- Clinical specimens for routine respiratory testing should be collected from approved Patients under Investigation (PUIs). Contact DOH to receive testing approval.
- Travelers from China or Iran will be contacted by your health department
- Travelers from Italy and South Korea should call 1-877-PA-HEALTH (1-877-724-3258) to inform the health department about your travel

Evaluating and Reporting Persons Under Investigation (PUI)

Limited information is available to characterize the spectrum of clinical illness associated with coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). No vaccine or specific treatment for COVID-19 is available; care is supportive.

The CDC clinical criteria for a COVID-19 person under investigation (PUI) have been developed based on what is known about COVID-19 and are subject to change as additional information becomes available.

Healthcare providers should call DOH at 1-877-PA-HEALTH (1-877-724-3258) or your local health department to report a PUI for COVID-19.

Criteria to Guide Evaluation of PUI for COVID-19

As availability of diagnostic testing for COVID-19 increases, clinicians will be able to access laboratory tests for diagnosing COVID-19 through clinical laboratories performing tests authorized by FDA under an Emergency Use Authorization (EUA). Clinicians will also be able to access laboratory testing through the Pennsylvania Department of Health Bureau of Laboratories (BOL).

This expands testing to a wider group of symptomatic patients. Clinicians should use their judgment to determine if a patient has signs and symptoms compatible with COVID-19 and whether the patient should be tested. Decisions on which patients receive testing should be based on the local epidemiology of COVID-19, as well as the clinical course of illness. Most patients with confirmed COVID-19 have developed fever¹ and/or symptoms of acute respiratory illness (e.g., cough, difficulty breathing). Clinicians are strongly encouraged to test for other causes of respiratory illness, including infections such as influenza. Depending on the availability of testing capacity, rapid influenza diagnostic tests or respiratory viral panels should be obtained.

Epidemiologic factors that may help guide decisions on whether to test include:

- Any persons, including healthcare workers², who have had close contact³ with a laboratory-confirmed⁴ COVID-19 patient within 14 days of symptom onset; or
- A history of travel from affected geographic areas⁵ (see below) within 14 days of symptom onset

International Areas with Sustained (Ongoing) Transmission

Last updated February 28, 2020

- China ([Level 3 Travel Health Notice](#))
- Iran ([Level 3 Travel Health Notice](#))
- Italy ([Level 3 Travel Health Notice](#))
- Japan ([Level 2 Travel Health Notice](#))
- South Korea ([Level 3 Travel Health Notice](#))

Recommendations for Reporting, Testing, and Specimen Collection

Updated February 28, 2020

Clinicians should immediately implement [recommended infection prevention and control practices](#) if a patient is suspected of having COVID-19. They should also notify infection control personnel at their healthcare facility and DOH or your local health department if a patient is classified as a PUI for COVID-19.

Note that CDC recommendations for specimen collection include performing the procedure in an Airborne Infection Isolation Room (AIIR) if available, and using appropriate PPE, which includes gloves, gowns, face shields, and N95 respirators. If an AIIR is not available, patients who require hospitalization should be transferred as soon as is feasible to a facility where an AIIR is available. If the patient does not require hospitalization they can be discharged to home if deemed medically and socially appropriate. Pending transfer or discharge, place a facemask on the patient and isolate him/her in an examination room with the door closed. Ideally, the patient should not be placed in any room where room exhaust is recirculated within the building without HEPA filtration. See [Interim Infection Prevention and Control Recommendations for Patients with COVID-19 or Persons Under Investigation for COVID-19](#) for additional information. If there is strong clinical suspicion for COVID-19 and the patient does not require hospitalization, call DOH at **1-877-PA-HEALTH (1-877-724-3258)**.

For initial diagnostic testing for SARS-CoV-2, CDC recommends collecting and testing:

- Upper respiratory tract specimens [**nasopharyngeal (NP) AND oropharyngeal (OP) swabs**].
- Lower respiratory tract specimens, if available.
- For patients who develop a productive cough, **sputum** should be collected and tested for SARS-CoV-2. The induction of sputum is not recommended.
- For patients for whom it is clinically indicated (e.g., those receiving invasive mechanical ventilation), a **lower respiratory tract aspirate or bronchoalveolar lavage sample** should be collected and tested as a lower respiratory tract specimen.

Specimens should be collected as soon as possible once a PUI is identified, regardless of the time of symptom onset. See [Interim Guidelines for Collecting, Handling, and Testing Clinical Specimens](#) from Patients Under Investigation (PUIs) for COVID-19 and [Biosafety FAQs](#) (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/lab/biosafety-faqs.html>) for handling and processing specimens from suspected cases and PUIs.

Footnotes

¹Fever may be subjective or confirmed

²For healthcare personnel, testing may be considered if there has been exposure to a person with suspected COVID-19 without laboratory confirmation. Because of their often extensive and close contact with vulnerable patients in healthcare settings, even mild signs and symptoms (e.g., sore throat) of COVID-19 should be evaluated among potentially exposed healthcare personnel.

Additional information is available in CDC's [Interim U.S. Guidance for Risk Assessment and Public Health Management of Healthcare Personnel with Potential Exposure in a Healthcare Setting to Patients with Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#).

³Close contact is defined as—

a) being within approximately 6 feet (2 meters) of a COVID-19 case for a prolonged period of time; close contact can occur while caring for, living with, visiting, or sharing a healthcare waiting area or room with a COVID-19 case

– or –

b) having direct contact with infectious secretions of a COVID-19 case (e.g., being coughed on)

If such contact occurs while not wearing recommended personal protective equipment or PPE (e.g., gowns, gloves, NIOSH-certified disposable N95 respirator, eye protection), criteria for PUI consideration are met.

Additional information is available in CDC's updated [Interim Infection Prevention and Control Recommendations for Patients with Confirmed COVID-19 or Persons Under Investigation for COVID-19 in Healthcare Settings](#).

Special consideration should be given to healthcare personnel exposed in healthcare settings as described in CDC's [Interim U.S. Guidance for Risk Assessment and Public Health Management of Healthcare Personnel with Potential Exposure in a Healthcare Setting to Patients with COVID-19](#).

⁴Documentation of laboratory-confirmation of COVID-19 may not be possible for travelers or persons caring for COVID-19 patients in other countries.

⁵Affected areas are defined as geographic regions where sustained community transmission has been identified. Relevant affected areas will be defined as a country with at least a CDC Level 2 Travel Health Notice. See all [COVID-19 Travel Health Notices](#).

Additional Resources:

- [World Health Organization \(WHO\) Coronavirus](#)
- [WHO guidance on clinical management of severe acute respiratory infection when COVID-19 is suspected](#)

Monitoring and Movement Guidance for Travelers

To slow the spread of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) into Pennsylvania, the Department of Health (DOH) is working with local public health partners to implement after-travel health precautions. There are currently four countries that have a Level 3 Travel Health Notice. Additional countries may be added to this list as the global situation continues to evolve. An updated list of countries can be found at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html>:

If you have returned from [Iran](#) or [China](#):

1. The health department will be notified by CDC and will contact you.

2. Stay home and practice social distancing for 14 days after travel. See below for specific directions.
3. Self-monitor your health for symptoms like fever, cough, or trouble breathing. If you become sick, call ahead to **1-877-PA-HEALTH (1-877-724-3258)** and the doctor's office or emergency room.

If you have returned from Italy or South Korea:

1. Call **1-877-PA-HEALTH (1-877-724-3258)** to let the health department know about your travel.
2. Stay home and practice social distancing for 14 days after travel. See below for specific directions.
3. Self-monitor your health for symptoms like fever, cough, or trouble breathing. If you become sick, call ahead to **1-877-PA-HEALTH (1-877-724-3258)** and the doctor's office or emergency room.

Travelers who have simply transited through airports in these countries (without leaving the airport) do not have to practice social distancing, but please still call us at **1-877-PA-HEALTH (1-877-724-3258)** so we are aware of your recent travel through affected countries.

Take these steps to monitor your health and practice social distancing:

1. Take your temperature with a thermometer two times a day and monitor for fever. Also watch for cough or trouble breathing.
2. Stay home and avoid contact with others. Do not go to work or school for this 14-day period.
3. Do not take public transportation, taxis, or ride-shares during the time you are practicing social distancing.
4. Avoid crowded places (such as shopping centers and movie theaters) and limit your activities in public.
5. Keep your distance from others (about 6 feet or 2 meters).

If you get sick with fever (100.4°F/38°C or higher), cough, or have trouble breathing:

- If you have a medical emergency, call 911 and let them know that you are under self-monitoring for COVID
- Seek medical care. Call ahead to **1-877-PA-HEALTH (1-877-724-3258)** before you go to a doctor's office or emergency room.
- Tell your doctor about your recent travel and your symptoms.
- Avoid contact with others.

If you need to seek medical care for other reasons, such as dialysis, call ahead to **1-877-PA-HEALTH (1-877-724-3258)** and your doctor and tell them about your recent travel to an area with widespread or ongoing community spread of COVID-19.

You can return to your regular routine when 14 days have passed since your departure date, provided you remain well and have not been diagnosed with COVID-19. For example, if you left a country with a Level 3 Travel Health Notice on March 1, you can return to work starting on March 15. Employers should not require a doctor's note to return to work.

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.

This information is current as of March 5, 2020 but may be modified in the future. We will continue to post updated information regarding the most common questions about this subject.