



Health Advisory: Updated San Francisco Public Health Laboratory Criteria for Testing Patients Who May Have COVID-19 Infection

March 6, 2020

SITUATIONAL UPDATE

On March 2, 2020, the San Francisco Public Health Laboratory (SFPHL) initiated testing using its first batch of test kits and is now able to perform testing for SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. This has significantly improved turn-around time, however **current capacity for testing by public health remains very limited**. COVID-19 testing is currently being offered by some clinical and commercial labs (including LabCorp), and additional laboratories are expected to offer testing in the coming days to weeks.

On March 4, CDC announced a significant expansion of testing criteria to permit testing for a wider group of symptomatic patients. CDC is encouraging clinicians to use their judgment to determine if a patient has signs and symptoms compatible with COVID-19 and whether the patient should be tested (see: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/clinical-criteria.html>). **Given limitations in public health capacity to test, clinicians are encouraged to pursue testing in non-public health labs if they do not meet the SFDPH clinical criteria outlined below.**

Widespread and/or sustained community transmission of COVID-19 is continuing to occur in countries other than China, including South Korea, Iran, Italy, and Japan. (see: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html>).

On March 5, SFDPH announced the first two cases of COVID-19 diagnosed in San Francisco residents. These cases are highly likely to be indicative of community transmission (see: <https://www.sfdph.org/dph/alerts/coronavirus.asp>).

UPDATE TO PERSONS ELIGIBLE FOR TESTING BY THE SAN FRANCISCO PUBLIC HEALTH LABORATORY

Due to current limitations in public health testing capacity, SFDPH has developed COVID-19 evaluation criteria that are narrower than CDC criteria and are intended to prioritize SARS-CoV-2 testing performed in the public health lab to identify patients at higher risk of having or transmitting COVID-19. These criteria are intended only for individuals who will be tested by San Francisco Public Health Laboratory:

1. Hospitalized patients with pneumonia/ARDS and no etiology identified
2. Fever OR respiratory symptoms in a close contact of a patient with lab-confirmed COVID-19 within 14 days of symptom onset



SFDPH has updated its clinical guidance for managing patients who may have COVID-19 infection to reflect these changes to testing criteria and availability. See <https://www.sfdcp.org/covid19hcp>.

If your patient meets the above criteria for testing at SFPHL, please collect COVID-19 specimens and call SFDPH Communicable Disease at (415) 554 – 2830 from 8am - 5pm to request a case number to send specimens to the lab. All requests for COVID-19 testing at SFPHL will be reviewed and prioritized by DPH. Upon COVID-19 test approval, referring providers will be asked to fill out the SFPHL General Requisition Form, available here: <https://www.sfdcp.org/public-health-lab/forms-specimen-culture-submission/>.

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