

New Testing Program in Nursing Homes and Rest Homes

March 30, 2020

Program overview and goals

We recognize that our elder populations, especially living in high-density environments like nursing homes and rest homes (Facility), are some of the most vulnerable people to COVID-19.

Currently, if a resident in a Facility is exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms, they need to leave their facility to get tested. This exposes them to even greater risk and can overwhelm emergency rooms and clinics.

This program allows for safe, onsite sample collection by trained personnel from the Massachusetts National Guard. A hotline has been created for Facilities to request a test from a resident; samples collected from residents will be transported directly to the Massachusetts State Public Health Lab (SPHL) who will work in conjunction with Broad Institute of MIT and Harvard, and prioritized for testing.

Facilities can expect to receive testing results in approximately 2 days, which will allow you and your staff to more quickly make the required changes to care that will help to mitigate the spread of the virus.

Thus, our goal is to both promote safer and more efficient testing for our vulnerable elders, as well provide the information and tools Facilities need to protect their residents. **We will be opening up the call line on Tuesday, March 31 to begin on-site testing on Wednesday, April 1.**

What you and your staff need to do to know to participate in this:

We have broken this program down in 7 steps:

Step 1: In-house Nurses and Authorized Prescriber identify residents with COVID-19 symptoms. Authorized Prescriber to place an order for a COVID-19 test

- Per the CDC, these symptoms include fever and/or symptoms of acute respiratory illness (e.g., cough, difficulty breathing)
- **The Authorized Prescriber on-call must place and order the test.**

Step 2: Administrator or designee calls our MA National Guard testing hotline at 339-202-3720 to schedule an in-facility test

- Starting Tuesday March 31, the hotline will be staffed 7 days a week from 7 AM-5PM ET with MA National Guard clinically-trained representatives
- These representatives will help you decide whether the patient is eligible for testing through this program. In order for a resident to be eligible for testing, they must have:

- A new fever OR mild to moderate respiratory illness (indicated by shortness of breath, cough, difficulty breathing)
 - An Authorized Prescriber MUST place an order the test in order for a National Guard representative to arrive. If there is no order from an Authorized Prescriber, the phone representative will instruct you to either call back when you have an order, or seek alternate care (ER, etc.)
 - It is recommended that influenza is ruled out, as well as other respiratory illnesses, before calling.
- Once you call the hotline, the call center staff will organize National Guard personnel to arrive on-site at your Facility the next day. In the case that your facility is being currently tracked by the DPH as a high-risk site, you may be prioritized to have an arrival same-day.

Step 3: Print and complete State Public Health Lab (SPHL) specimen submission form (paper) prior to arrival

- Form will collect demographic and clinical information on the resident (see attached)
- One form must be completed for each resident that will be tested.
- This must be completed prior to arrival on-site and PRINTED for collection by National Guard representatives, along with the patient sample. It is extremely important that this information is filled-out in full for proper epidemiological tracking and patient reporting.
- ***See attached for a copy of this form***

Step 4: Greet MA National Guard personnel and allow them to conduct specimen collection

- 2 National Guard personnel will arrive at the Facility entrance wearing their uniforms, and will be equipped with the proper specimen collection kits and PPE
- Please ensure security is aware of their visit to facilitate easy sign in.
- The National Guard personnel will enter the building, sign in with security, and don PPE once inside the building.
- They will then need to be escorted to the resident's room, where they will take a nasopharyngeal swab sample (NP). National Guard members will be equipped with test kits, such that distribution of test kits to Facilities is not necessary.
- If multiple patients in a building are exhibiting symptoms, they will swab each patient and collect the specimen and SPHL test form.
- Finally, they will walk back to the building entrance and doff their PPE before leaving the building. A red PPE disposal container must be provided by the entrance of each building to allow the National Guard members to dispose of their PPE before leaving

Step 5: Await test results from the MA State Lab – typically ~2 days later

- These tests will be managed by the Massachusetts state lab in conjunction with the Broad Institute in Cambridge. All tests will be paid for by the state.
- Our Massachusetts State Lab will share results communicate the results to the provider indicated on the SPHL specimen submission form and the Local Board of Health of the Facility as soon as they are received.

Step 6: Once tested with symptoms; the resident is presumed positive, isolate the resident and their close contacts

- Please act per established policies and procedures of your Facility.
- Please consult with your local Board of Health for protocols on isolation.

Step 7: Prepare to test close contacts

- Contact the hotline to schedule tests for others who have been in close contact with positive cases and are symptomatic.