

COVID-19 Testing Ordering and Resulting Guidance

To: Healthcare Providers, Clinical Laboratories and Local Boards of Health

Date: August 1, 2020

RE: Provision of COVID-19 tests and results

This document includes guidance about best practices for COVID-19 diagnostic test ordering and reporting of results. This guidance is not intended to replace or supersede clinical judgment; clinicians concerned that their patient has COVID-19 or has been exposed to COVID-19 should order and provide test results as they deem most appropriate.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COVID-19 TEST ORDERING:

The Department of Public Health recommends that, when possible, providers for testing sites available to the public use a single clinician to order all COVID-19 tests administered at a given testing site. This is recommended for the purposes of easing administrative burden for the testing site provider, as well as allowing for more streamlined laboratory processing and resulting. Testing site providers are advised to have one standing order for all patients who are tested for COVID-19 at their testing site(s).

However, this recommendation must not limit nor restrict a patient who otherwise has an existing order from another healthcare provider from being tested at a given testing site.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COVID-19 TEST RESULTING:

COVID-19 testing providers should always follow their clinical judgement regarding the most appropriate way to contact and relay test results to their patients. Quickly communicating results of COVID-19 laboratory tests is a critical part of reducing the spread of the disease and is a required part of providing testing services. It is not appropriate to direct patients to contact the state or local health department for their results. The following recommendation outline best practices for communicating test results with patients.

Positive test results: All individuals whose COVID-19 test results are positive must be contacted by a clinician and provided with clear [instructions to self-isolate](#). Patients should also be informed that they will be contacted by a contact tracer and be urged to answer the phone.

The following information should be communicated to all positive cases:

- Contact tracing calls will appear with the area code 833 or 857 and your phone will say the call is from “MA COVID Team.” Calls are made daily from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.
- It is essential that you self-isolate until you have been fever-free for at least 24 hours without the use of medication, any of your respiratory symptoms have improved, and at least 10 days have passed since your symptoms first appeared. If you did not have symptoms, you must isolate for 10 days from the date your positive test was taken.

- If your symptoms become so severe that you are unable to take care of yourself (i.e., unable to consume liquids and food, experiencing excessive light-headedness, severe shortness of breath, etc.), you should immediately contact your healthcare provider, or for emergencies, dial 911.

If an individual indicates that they need a place to safely isolate, testing site providers can call (617) 367-5150 between the hours of 7am and 7pm in order to access Isolation & Recovery Sites in Everett and Northampton. Additional information regarding the Isolation and Recovery Sites can be found [here](#).

Patients should be directed to contact their primary care provider or medical home for additional medical advice and follow up.

Negative test results: All individuals whose COVID-19 test results are negative must be informed promptly of their results, but do not need to be contacted by a clinician. Patients should be told that their test indicates only that they were negative at the time of testing and that they may still develop COVID-19 and be tested if symptoms occur. If they have additional questions, they should be in contact with their healthcare provider.

Testing site providers can designate a member of their staff such as an administrative staff member contact individuals with negative test results. Phone calls are not required for every patient, testing site providers may utilize HIPAA compliant messages (e.g., online portals, secure emails) to inform patients of negative test results. In the case that testing site providers decide to utilize HIPAA compliant electronic communications to inform patients of negative COVID-19 test results, patients must be clearly informed of this policy prior to receiving a COVID-19 test and should be provided contact information if they do not receive their result.