Philadelphia Department of Public Health
Division of COVID Containment

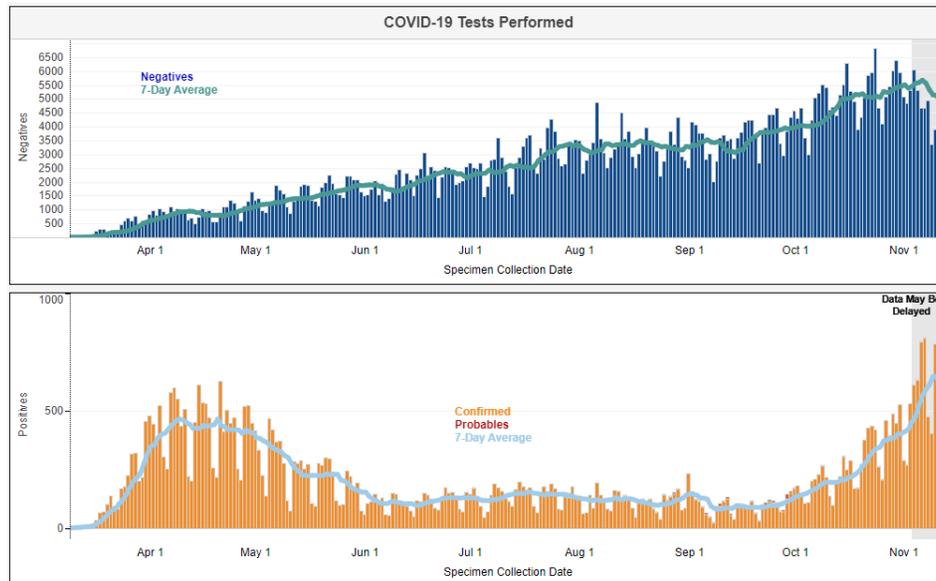| THOMAS A. FARLEY, MD, MPH	SHARA EPSTEIN, MD	MOLLY HARRAR, MS
Health Commissioner	*Medical Director, Division of COVID-19 Containment*	*Director, Division of COVID-19 Containment*

Health Advisory
Guidance on Testing for COVID-19
November 14, 2020

SUMMARY POINTS

- Testing availability has increased in recent months; rapid point-of-care testing could be critical in slowing the spread of COVID-19.
- Respiratory specimens may be collected by trained healthcare providers in office settings utilizing appropriate PPE.
- All point-of-care testing must be reported to PDPH.

Rates of COVID-19 infections are rapidly increasing. Hospitalizations and deaths related to COVID have also started to increase. Bed capacity in Philadelphia hospitals remains sufficient so far. Rapid identification of COVID-19 infections is critical in slowing the spread of the virus. Access to testing services has significantly increased, and a filterable list of testing sites is available on our website (https://www.phila.gov/testing). PDPH recommends individual healthcare offices and providers offer and refer patients to testing when indicated.

The Philadelphia Department of Public Health is recommending testing for:

- **Persons of any age** who present with new onset of:
  - Cough
  - Shortness of breath
  - Difficulty breathing
  - Loss of taste or smell
- **Persons of any age** who present with new onset of two or more of the following symptoms:
  - Fever
  - Chills
  - Sore throat
  - Runny nose/congestion
  - Muscle pain
  - Headache
  - Fatigue
  - Diarrhea
  - Nausea or vomiting
- **The following groups of people even if they are asymptomatic.** Testing should be done 5-7 days after contact for those who:
  - **Have a close contact diagnosed with COVID-19**. For children in school or daycare, this will be applicable when someone in their cohort tests positive.
  - **Were in or near a large crowd for an extended period of time.**

Types of COVID-19 Tests

Test	Accuracy	Results Interval	When to Use	Considerations
Reverse Transcription Polymerase Chain Reaction (RT-PCR)	• High sensitivity and specificity • Cannot distinguish between live (infectious) and dead (non-infectious) virus	Typically 24-72 hours but longer with high volume	Any	Re-test after negative results when COVID-19 is suspected based on exposure history and clinical findings.
Rapid Point-of-Care (POC) Tests	More false negatives and false positives than RT-PCR. Molecular POC assays detect the presence of viral genetic material. Antigen POC tests identify a surface protein of the virus.	15-45 minutes	• Most accurate in those with symptoms 5-7 days after onset • Asymptomatic persons with recent COVID-19 exposure when community transmission (≥2% positivity) is high	**Providers must report POC results to PDPH.** Re-test via RT-PCR or rapid POC test 24-48 hours after unexpected negative POC test. **Can be critical in reducing COVID-19 spread**

Specimen Collection and Transport

The following are acceptable specimen types can be used for COVID-19 testing, but the exact specimen type should be determined based on guidance from the laboratory or test in use.

- Collected by trained healthcare personnel
  - A nasopharyngeal (NP) specimen
  - An oropharyngeal (OP) specimen
  - A nasal mid-turbinate swab using a flocked tapered swab
  - Nasopharyngeal wash/aspirate or nasal wash/aspirate (NW) specimen
  - An anterior nares (nasal swab) specimen using a flocked or spun polyester swab
- Self-collection of nasal mid-turbinate (flocked tapered swab) can be performed when supervised and onsite.
- Anterior nares (nasal) using a flocked or spun polyester swab and saliva specimen can be collected by the person being tested, either at home or at a testing site under supervision.

Safety During Specimen Collection

- Specimens may be collected in a standard exam room with the door closed.
- The patient should keep their mask on over their nose and mouth except when being tested.
- Collection of an anterior nares swab should not generate an aerosol. Therefore, it is acceptable to use either a medical mask or N95 respirator. In addition, eye protection, gown and gloves should be used if the health care provider is collecting the sample.
- Maintain distance and use standard precautions including eye protection for self-collection.
- After the patient leaves the room, surfaces must be cleaned and disinfected with an EPA approved disinfectant for Coronavirus (true of most disinfectant wipes used in healthcare settings).

Specimen Transport

Per CDC guidance, swabs should be placed immediately into a sterile transport tube containing the recommended medium unless for a directly analyzed test. Standard precautions should be used in sample handling.

Point-of-Care Result Reporting

Healthcare providers, infection prevention practitioners, and other partner agencies should report POC or other in-house rapid tests to PDPH electronically or by phone at 215-685-5488 (after hours: 215-686-4514). When reporting, please include contact information for case follow up (mobile phone and / or email address). For assistance with electronic reporting, please email COVIDTesting@phila.gov.

For additional information and updates about COVID-19 and diagnostic testing, please see:
- Surveillance: https://www.phila.gov/programs/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19/testing-and-data/
- Guidance: https://hip.phila.gov/EmergentHealthTopics/2019-nCoV