



1. Why are long-term care residents and staff being tested?

We know that COVID-19 spreads easily in congregate settings and may be spread by individuals who are not ill. To limit the spread, we want to identify infected residents and staff members so they can appropriately isolate themselves.

2. Is testing required?

Yes

3. Will facilities be penalized for failure to test?

Facilities that do not comply will be reported to Health Care Facilities

4. When should testing be completed?

As soon as possible. The survey in question 5 must be completed by May 31st showing your intent to comply.

5. How do we arrange testing?

- A request or “intent to test” survey should be made by each licensed long-term care facility (nursing home, assisted living center or home for the aged) at <https://redcap.health.tn.gov/redcap/surveys/?s=PWEFRY4N4M>
- A TDH team member will reach out to discuss arrangements and make sure your plan meets requirements.

6. What lab will be performing the testing?

Testing can either be done at the State Public Health Lab (SPHL), commercial labs with whom the State has agreements or through commercial laboratories with whom the facility has agreements. Facility preference and State capacity will be taken into consideration. Commercial labs must use a test with FDA emergency use authorization and report results as required by law <https://www.tn.gov/health/cedep/reportable-diseases.html>

7. Will costs of testing be reimbursed?

The State will only pay for the one or two day event testing itself, necessary supplies and overnight shipping if needed. Data must be reported back before reimbursement will occur.

8. Will the State Public Health Laboratory do the testing if desired?

The State Public Health Laboratory will be able to perform testing at no charge. All testing events should be discussed with the team at COVID19.Testing@tn.gov to ensure PPE and lab capacity and other requirements including data reporting.

9. Can a facility do testing themselves through a private vendor?

Yes, although testing plans and results need to be discussed in advance with the TN Department of Health (COVID19.Testing@tn.gov).

10. What type of testing is being performed?

Nasopharyngeal (NP) specimens are preferred to test for the virus that causes COVID-19 via polymerase chain reaction (PCR).

11. Is a nasopharyngeal (NP) specimen necessary?

If using the State Public Health Laboratory, an NP swab is preferred. See video training link at: <http://repository.netecweb.org/pdfs/COVID-19%20Lab%20Spec%20Coll%20Nasopharyngeal%20Swab.mp4>

12. Can the State provide staff members to help with a mass testing event?

Nursing homes are expected to perform the testing themselves. Public health staff can be made available to sample at facilities without nursing staff such as assisted living centers but facility support will be required for tube labeling and requisition completion.

13. Can staff members not scheduled on the testing day be tested?

Testing may be done over multiple shifts on one (1) day and possibly the following morning; refrigerated specimens must arrive at the laboratory within 72 hours of collection. Temporary staff that are not on site at the time of sampling are not required to be tested. They may seek testing at community sites. Contracted staff such as dietary and environmental services staff should be encouraged to be tested as well.

14. Can the State provide PPE for the collection event?

Yes. PPE cannot be provided for other routine activities in the facility.

15. Can residents and staff refuse testing?

Yes

16. What should employees do while awaiting test results?

Since healthcare workers (HCWs) are considered critical infrastructure employees, it is reasonable for asymptomatic employees who are awaiting test result to continue to work as long as they wear a mask at all times and continue to adhere to basic infection prevention practices, including hand hygiene.

17. How long will it take to receive test results?

If using the State public health lab, it is typically within 72 hours.

18. If a facility has already done testing of residents and staff, do they need to repeat it now?

At this time, a one-time testing event is required but you need to report results to the state by completing the survey in question #5 and discuss with the team by emailing COVID19.Testing@tn.gov

19. What happens if a resident tests positive?

Isolate the patient and contact the Health Department immediately. Cohorting of positive patients is an acceptable option if needed.

20. What happens if an employee tests positive for COVID-19?

The employer should notify the health department immediately. Any employee who tests positive should stop working immediately, regardless of whether or not symptoms are present. The employee should stay home and self-isolate for a minimum of 10 days after testing was performed, even if the employee does not develop symptoms during this time. If symptoms develop during that time, the employee must also stay home for a minimum of 72 hours after recovery (defined as feeling well and without a fever in the absence of fever-reducing medications). These recommendations from the CDC may evolve but are updated at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/return-to-work.html>

21. (added 6/3/20) A staff member or resident had a positive test, followed by a negative test... what does this mean? Why does public health consider this person a case?

In the vast majority of cases, public health treats a positive PCR result as the true result. Unless there is evidence that a laboratory has had a known contamination event or that there is a fundamental flaw in their testing platform, TDH counts a positive test as a true positive - even if

the person is asymptomatic and/or retested and negative. There are a few reasons for this policy:

- **In the course of clinical illness, we expect to see a positive PCR result, followed by a negative PCR result.** It is extremely difficult to interpret results from multiple tests obtained at different points in time from the same person: viral loads may decrease dramatically over a relatively short period of time and there are reports of discordant test results from patients tested from day to day (which may be an issue of how the swab was taken or the amount of viral shedding that is occurring at a particular point in time).
- **PCR positive cases can be asymptomatic.** A proportion of individuals (current best estimate is ~35% - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/planning-scenarios.html>) are asymptomatic for the entirety of their infection, but are still capable of transmitting virus to others.
- **Different laboratories and testing platforms have differing sensitivities,** which can lead to differing results, even on the same specimen. A laboratory test that is especially sensitive can detect a small amount of viral material, leading to a positive result. While another test which may not be as sensitive as the first, and thus would have a higher threshold of detection, would lead to a negative result.
- **Incorrectly interpreting a test result could but others at risk of infection.** The implications of making the incorrect determination that someone's test was a false positive result and not a true infection could unnecessarily exposure others to the virus.

22. Will the results of the testing be made public?

The number of COVID-19 cases among employees and staff members will be included in weekly updates released through the Tennessee Department of Health.

23. Are resources available for Infection Prevention support?

Many excellent resources are available online including frequently updated information from the CDC at [Responding to Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) in Nursing Homes](#). Phone consultations are available with certified infection preventionists at TDH. Email HAI.Health@tn.gov.

24. Who is the point of contact within TDH for facilities if questions arise?

Questions should be directed to both COVID19.Testing@tn.gov.

