

COVID-19 Testing Priorities

As COVID-19 continues to spread across the globe and throughout communities across Georgia, we must take measures to slow the spread of the virus in order to protect those that are most vulnerable to severe outcomes from the disease, and enable our healthcare system to deliver care to those in need.

The key to slowing the spread of COVID-19 is to practice social distancing, which includes:

- Putting distance between yourself and other people if COVID-19 is spreading in your community
- Avoiding close contact with people who are sick
- Washing your hands frequently and thoroughly

The most important step in containing the disease is that people who are sick with any mild respiratory symptoms (low grade fever, mild cough) should stay home and isolate themselves from others until after the symptoms have resolved.

Laboratory testing is also an important step in containing the disease and protecting both the healthcare system and vulnerable populations, but not everyone with respiratory symptoms needs to be tested. **Most people who are mildly or moderately ill with “cold-like” symptoms do not need to be tested.** The majority of people with COVID-19 can safely recover at home with self-isolation and symptomatic treatment, and diagnosis through laboratory testing does not change the care they would receive. Older adults and people who have severe underlying medical conditions like heart or lung disease or diabetes seem to be at higher risk for developing more serious complications from COVID-19 and should always consult their healthcare provider if sick.

The expanding COVID-19 pandemic has and will continue to impact inventories of personal protective equipment (PPE) and laboratory testing supplies. As such, we can best protect our communities and healthcare providers by only testing those whose laboratory diagnosis would have the biggest impact on healthcare infrastructure or spread of disease. This includes:

- Hospitalized patients with severe illness. Lab confirmation of COVID-19 may not only help direct care of these patients and allow healthcare workers to protect themselves but finding out they do not have COVID-19 can also save critical PPE and leave isolation rooms available for others who need it.

DPH is also establishing drive-through collection centers at various locations across the state. **The purpose of these centers is to collect specimens from mildly ill people who do not require medical care or hospitalization and fall into one of the other prioritized groups.** The specimens collected at the Collection Centers will be sent for testing at either a commercial laboratory or the Georgia Public Health Laboratory.

Per DPH and federal guidelines, the people who should be prioritized for testing at these remote Specimen Collection Centers include:

- Healthcare workers and other first responders who are critical for caring for our nation during this epidemic, and who frequently interact with vulnerable populations.
- People working with and caring for vulnerable populations, such as long-term care facility staff.
- People living in congregate settings where the disease can spread rapidly.

Only individuals who have been evaluated by a healthcare provider and assigned a PUI # number will be referred to these drive-thru sites. **A centralized referral system for healthcare providers has been developed by DPH. The link to access this referral system is below and instructions are attached.**

<https://dhpexternal.dph.ga.gov/spoc.html>