
LAB ALERT #14: SARS-CoV-2 TESTING UPDATES (3/21)

Substitute for Viral Transport Medium: The South Dakota Public Health Laboratory (SDPHL) received word from FDA that sterile saline (0.85%) and phosphate buffered saline (PBS) are suitable alternatives for VTM for SARS-CoV-2 testing. SDPHL is currently performing a small verification study to ensure the SARS-CoV-2 RT-PCR test is not adversely impacted by a change in transport medium. SDPHL will update our clinical partners following completion of the verification process. PLEASE NOTE: SDPHL has no information to suggest sterile saline or PBS can be substituted for VTM for respiratory pathogen panel testing.

Sputum Testing: SDPHL will only accept sputum samples from patients with signs of pneumonia. Sputum should always be collected alongside a nasopharyngeal swab. SDPHL will only test sputum after the accompanying nasopharyngeal swab has been tested.

Specimen Triage for SARS-CoV-2 Testing: Samples received by the SDPHL will be triaged according to the following priority groups:

- Individuals who are hospitalized
- Persons in institutional settings (long-term care, assisted living centers, etc)
- Healthcare workers and first responders

Current Turn-around Time for SARS-CoV-2 Testing: SDPHL is again providing same-day turn-around of SARS-CoV-2 test results for the high-priority groups listed above; this TAT is volume dependent. SDPHL has received information from partner clinical laboratories in South Dakota that suggests commercial laboratories are providing 3-5 day TAT. SDPHL asks that high-priority patients be tested by the SDPHL with same-day TAT, and all other patients be tested by commercial laboratories.

Testing Stewardship: Healthcare providers can order a test for their patients at the provider's discretion. However, due to the overwhelming shortage of critical supplies nationwide, the SDPHL recommends good stewardship practices for the use of specimen collection supplies and tests (regardless of who provides testing services).

Specimen Storage: All samples received by the SDPHL are stored at the appropriate temperature defined by CDC until testing is complete. For specimens submitted this week but not tested for SARS-CoV-2, SDPHL has moved those specimens to -70C cold storage.

Please distribute this LAB ALERT to others in your facility that may need this information.