

COVID-19 Testing in General Practice

The current community COVID-19 positive case is a timely reminder for general practices to continue their vigilance in preventing the spread of coronavirus.

Primary care response

Primary care is now at **Yellow Alert Level** on the metro Auckland [COVID-19 Primary Care Alert Response Framework](#). This temporary measure will be under constant review.

Continue to be vigilant with all COVID-19 testing. Note the importance of continuing to use full PPE for any COVID-19 testing.

Consider every patient has the virus – not just those with respiratory symptoms. Please continue to TRIAGE before there is any contact with the patient if possible by phone or signage. If that is not possible triage and manage at a distance by maintaining a safe distance of 2 metres if possible. Minimise exposure time to the patient to less than 15 minutes.

Ask the essential questions about Covid-19 symptoms and about HIS criteria, also checking if a person is connected with the current community cases.

We are aware that many patients seem not to understand this and walk into the practice despite having symptoms or close contacts with border workers etc.

Medical-Grade Mask Wearing

To maintain safety and infection control, medical grade masks should be worn by ALL practice staff for all clinical interactions. ALL patients entering the practice should be provided with a CLEAN MEDICAL-GRADE MASK from the PHO supply with instructions on their use. This includes hand sanitisation before the mask is worn. Please follow all IPC/PPE guidance accordingly <https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/pages/alert-level-1-ppe-guidelines-unknown-covid-status-22sept2020.pdf>

Testing

ALL patients symptomatic and ALL patients requesting a COVID-19 test (even asymptomatic) should be swabbed, as well as those fitting the criteria <https://aucklandregion.communityhealthpathways.org/707728.htm>

If for any reason, the practice cannot provide a COVID-19 test, refer patients to one of the Community Testing Sites <https://www.arphs.health.nz/public-health-topics/covid-19/where-to-get-tested> or Designated Practices. The Testing Site information is updated often according to possible infection clusters. Please continue to check ARPHS website for up to date community testing centres and pop up CTCs open over the weekend and into next week.

Always check if you need to call ahead first or send a referral letter. In the event a patient is referred to a testing centre, please ask them to notify you when the test has been completed.

There have been instances when patients have not gone directly to a testing centre and then found it to be closed on arrival, which poses significant risk to the community.

Note also that all COVID-19 testing should be free to patients, with the of exception pre-travel testing.

Asymptomatic Testing – Clarification

The updated testing strategy provided every two weeks from the MoH highlights asymptomatic testing priorities (for example, pregnant or recently pregnant women, comorbid patients, Māori or Pacific people), however clinicians are still able to continue to test other asymptomatic individuals at their discretion. For further information regarding current local testing priorities click here: [COVID-19 Requests and Local Processes](#)

Alternative Swab Technique for Border Workers Available

An alternative swab technique for Covid swabbing is approved for those Border workers required to be tested every 14 days under the Border Order, and who are unable to tolerate standard nasopharyngeal swabs. These workers may present to Primary Care and can request an oropharyngeal with bilateral anterior nasal swabs as an alternative to the nasopharyngeal route. Note, this is for **Border workers only** and should not be routinely offered to the public. Please find attached supporting learning materials and FAQs.

[Alternate Swab FAQs For Workers.pdf](#) [166.8 KB]

[Oropharyngeal with Ant Nares swab teaching-PHC 6_11_2020.pdf](#) [2 MB]

Nebuliser and Spirometry Use in Primary Care

There have been a number of queries regarding the use of spirometry and nebulisers in the primary care setting. The MoH has recently released a position on the removal of nebulised medications from the list of Aerosol Generating Procedures (AGP). The Northern Region Health Coordination Centre (NRHCC) Clinical and Technical Advisory Group (CTAG) has reviewed the MoH position and is finalising advice for the Northern Region, which will be ready to circulate later this week. The NRHCC and CTAG advice takes a cautious approach regarding the place of nebulisation, and a more cautious approach than recent Ministry of Health advice regarding appropriate PPE when nebulisation is necessary, in the context of COVID-19. Advice regarding spirometry in primary care will also be released at the same time.

PPE Supplies

If you require additional PPE during the weekend or on Monday, please phone Suzie 021 430 188.