What To Do With A Suspected COVID-19 Patient
Updated: March 16, 2020

Dear Physicians:

It is important to keep up to date on the evolving COVID-19 global outbreak to protect patients and healthcare personnel. This situation is compounded by ongoing respiratory infections from other viruses such as influenza, which must also be appropriately treated. Providers should be aware of Criteria for COVID Testing (Metro Health as of March 16, 2020) to take appropriate actions and use available resources appropriately. If you are not equipped to handle potential COVID-19 infections, please do not refer patients to the Emergency Room, but rather to their primary care provider for testing. The patient should contact the primary care provider prior to visiting the PCP to ensure a mask and isolation area are available upon arrival.

Respiratory viral swabs and test reagents are limited, so targeted testing is needed to conserve these resources. We are still in flu season and if patients have upper respiratory symptoms, please order an upper respiratory virus panel before considering COVID-19. If a patient has classic influenza symptoms, such as fever, myalgias, and cough, you do not have to wait for a positive influenza screen to order empiric anti-influenza drugs.

Consider COVID-19 testing for the following patients:
1. Seriously ill with an upper respiratory infection requiring hospitalization
2. Unresponsive to empiric influenza therapy
3. For outpatients, criteria for COVID-19 testing are cough and fever, exposure to a known COVID-19 patient, or travel to an area with a known high incidence of COVID-19.

Triage Screening Questions for COVID-19
All patients with fever and/or symptoms of lower respiratory illness (e.g. cough, shortness of breath) need to be asked about travel history. Questions should include:
1. Have you or any of your household members traveled to high risk areas for COVID-19 internationally or within the U.S. within the past 14 days?
3. Have you or any of your household members been in close contact with a person under investigation for COVID-19 disease in the past 14 days while that person was ill?

What should I do if a patient meets risk criteria after asking triage screen questions?
1. Ask the patient to wear a surgical mask (NOT an N-95 respirator).
2. Move the patient to a private room and close the door, or to an airborne isolation room if available, and implement airborne and contact isolation precautions.
3. All healthcare personnel who enter the room must perform appropriate hand hygiene and wear appropriate personal protective equipment to include N-95 respirator (or surgical mask if no N-95 respirator is available), gown, gloves, and eye protection (either goggles or face shield).

4. **Pre-approval is required for all test specimens.** Call Metro Health Epidemiology at (210-207-8876) for pre-approval and information about required forms for COVID-19 testing. You may request a test kit from Metro Health or use a universal viral transport medium, such as for herpes PCR, and a synthetic fiber swab (i.e., Dacron) with a plastic shaft. Do not use cotton tip swabs with a wooden shaft. More: [COVID-19 Specimen Collection and Submission Instructions](#). Please note that two forms are required, a DSHS G-2V Virology Specimen Submission Form (obtained from Metro Health) and a CDC COVID-19 PUI and [Case Report Form](#).

5. LabCorp, Quest and ARUP have the capability to test for COVID-19 virus as a send-out to them. The cost is reasonable.

6. Patients should NOT be immediately referred to the Emergency Department or hospital as this will NOT expedite testing.

7. If respiratory viral panel testing is to be performed, only ONE respiratory viral swab of both nostrils needs to be collected for processing of both Respiratory viral panel and COVID-19 testing.

8. Transfer the patient to an ER if they develop respiratory distress such as hypoxia or an unsustainable rapid respiratory rate. Otherwise, recommend self-quarantine for symptomatic patients who are awaiting test results who have supportive care and can maintain social distancing from other family members. [Information for patients](#).

Metro Health has added nurses to the public COVID hotline, (210) 207-5779, to reduce calls to your offices and help you conserve PPE.