



Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services
HEALTH ALERT NETWORK
Advisory



TO: Healthcare Providers, Infection Control, Hospitals, Labs, and Public Health
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RE: Ordering COVID-19 Test at Nebraska Public Health Lab
DATE: April 1, 2020

AVAILABILITY OF COVID-19 TEST ORDERING AT NEBRASKA PUBLIC HEALTH LAB (NPHL) BY NEBRASKA HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS

We have enabled direct on-line ordering of the COVID-19 PCR test at NPHL without telephone pre-approval by public health. NPHL testing is provided at public health expense and provides an in-state alternative with excellent turn-around time. Patients tested at NPHL are **REQUIRED** to meet the priority requirements below:

In-patients: Any in-patient will be tested.

Out-patients: Persons in these groups with a clinical or rule-out diagnosis of COVID-19 can be tested at NPHL.

- Healthcare workers
- Public Safety/First Responders (EMS, law enforcement, firefighters)
- Residents and staff at nursing homes
- Residents and staff at group homes, homeless shelters, and daycare facilities
- Individuals > 65 years old, and patient with serious underlying conditions

Providers can seek NPHL testing for patients who fail to meet these requirements based on special circumstances that warrant rapid turnaround time. Contact a state/local public health authority for telephone pre-authorization. For all other patients, order COVID-19 testing through either in-state or national commercial laboratories.

To maximize throughput at NPHL, the lab is group-testing pooled specimens. Pools are created using five individual specimens. If the pool tests negative, all five contributors are considered negative. If the pool tests positive, the individual contributors to the pool are retested separately. This conserves reagents and allows more persons to be tested. To optimize this method, we request that ordering providers indicate on the order form if the provider believes the likelihood of a positive test to be high or low. The low likelihood specimens will be pooled to help save on scarce kits and reagents used to run the test.

There are options for ordering a test at NPHL. While our preference is to use on-line NUIrt (the NPHL lab information system) ordering to complete an order (options 1, 2, and 3), the fourth option below provides for paper requisition/submission to NPHL where the order will be entered

into NUIirt at the time of receipt at NPHL. When ordering electronically through NUIirt, **pay particular attention to the e-mail account (i.e., user id) utilized at the time of log-on to NUIirt**, as the result will be reported back by secure e-mail to that account. Collect the patient specimen **either** in-clinic or at a designated COVID-19 collection site. Those ordering electronically need to generate a printed, completed NPHL order by clicking the NUIirt system to accompany the specimen.

- 1) Ordering providers can utilize their existing account or set up a new account, and order COVID-19 tests themselves directly out of their clinic. This entails collecting the specimen, labeling the specimen, submitting the order into NUIirt, printing out the “completed order” and “batch shipping” documents from NUIirt, and arranging for courier delivery of specimens and associated documents via NPHL client services (402-559-2440).
- 2) Laboratories can place the order into NUIirt on behalf of an ordering provider. Providers must submit the specimen accompanied by a completed **COVID-19 NPHL REQUISITION** (attached) to the laboratory placing the order into NUIirt. Laboratories cannot place the order into NUIirt without the signed **COVID-19 NPHL REQUISITION**. Ordering labs are responsible for getting test results back to the ordering provider.
- 3) Ordering providers can refer patients to designated COVID-19 specimen collection sites, and fax or e-mail a completed **COVID-19 NPHL REQUISITION** OR have the patient take the completed form with them to the specimen collection site. COVID-19 specimen collection sites must have a completed, signed **COVID-19 NPHL REQUISITION** to proceed with specimen collection if referring the specimen to NPHL. COVID-19 specimen collection sites can place the order electronically into NUIirt, or reflex to option #4. Specimen collection sites placing electronic orders are responsible for getting test results back to the ordering provider.
- 4) Ordering providers, laboratories, and designated COVID-19 specimen collection sites can send the **COVID-19 NPHL REQUISITION** PLUS the N-P specimen via courier to NPHL where the test will be electronically ordered through NUIirt. Please note the importance of specifying the account on the **COVID-19 NPHL REQUISITION** to insure delivery of the test result via fax or secure e-mail.

Access NUIirt here (<https://nulirt.nebraskamed.com>) using your existing NUIirt account. If you are a new user, follow the link to register and create a new account. If you are having issues getting access to NUIirt, reach out to the NUIirt support group via email nulirtsupport@nebraskamed.com. There are also client service representatives available to assist with ordering through the NUIirt system at 402-559-2440; or toll free: 1-866-290-1406.

These recommendations are subject to revision depending on COVID-19 lab testing capacity at NPHL and commercial laboratories.

Specimen Collection Requirements:

See **Collecting and Handling COVID-19 Laboratory Specimens**, <http://www.nphl.org/>.

- **Nasopharyngeal Swab (NP)**: 1 (one) nasopharyngeal swab should be placed in a single tube of viral transport medium (VTM).
- **Lower respiratory specimen**: sputum is acceptable if the patient is producing sputum; do not induce sputum.

