



LAC DPH Health Alert:
Preserving Critical Supplies and Resources;
New COVID-19 Mortality Reporting
March 25, 2020



*This message is intended for all healthcare providers practicing in Los Angeles County.
Please distribute as appropriate.*

Key Messages

Preserve critical supplies and resources

- Los Angeles County Department of Public Health (LAC DPH) is asking all health care providers and facilities to implement measures to preserve personal protective equipment (PPE) and other critical supplies now. National and local shortages of PPE are being reported as are constraints on laboratory tests and resources. This health alert outlines important actions to preserve critical supplies including reducing non-essential COVID-19 testing; discontinuing non-essential appointments, procedures, and clinics; and following CDC contingency strategies for optimizing PPE.
- Providers should continue to follow the focused testing recommendations outlined in the [March 19 LAHAN](#). In particular, healthcare providers are urged to refrain from testing patients with mild symptoms who can be managed at home. Asymptomatic patients should not be tested. Hospitals experiencing significant delays in COVID-19 test results may request testing through the DPH Public Health Lab (PHL) for patients admitted to intensive care units (ICUs) (see below).
- Facemasks are no longer required for the remainder of the 2019-2020 influenza season (for unvaccinated healthcare personnel), as sentinel influenza surveillance data indicates that the current season has ended (defined as <5% of respiratory specimens are testing positive for influenza). (See DPH [Rescission of the Health Office Order for Annual Influenza Vaccination of Healthcare Personnel or Masking During the Influenza Season](#)).
- Refer patients to hospital emergency departments (EDs) if there is a clinical indication to do so. Patients with mild illness suggestive of COVID-19 who could otherwise be managed outside of an ED should not be sent to EDs for the sole purpose of specimen collection. Skilled nursing facilities and long term care facilities should develop procedures for collecting and sending specimens for COVID-19 testing, see revised [Guidance](#) for Managing COVID-19 in Long-Term Care Facilities (3-23-20).

New healthcare provider reporting

- Provider [reporting requirements](#) have been revised to include COVID-19 associated deaths which must be reported by hospitals immediately. All other cases must be reported within a day of positive laboratory result. (see Reporting below).

Situation

The rate of new COVID-19 cases in LA County continues to steadily increase (see the LA County [COVID-19 Surveillance Data](#)). We need to collectively prepare for a surge of newly infected patients including those who are critically ill. Lessons learned from the experiences of other states and countries affected earlier by COVID-19 indicate that we need to plan and prepare for surges of ill patients and to try to avert severe shortages of medical supplies, staffing, hospital beds, ICU level beds, and ventilators.

Major distributors in the United States have reported shortages of PPE supplies including eye protection, gloves, gowns, N95 respirators, and masks. Locally, our stockpile of emergency PPE supplies managed by the LA County Medical and Health Operational Area Coordination (MHOAC) Program has been depleted of N95 respirators and masks and has limited other equipment. While more supplies are expected shortly, it is anticipated that the supply may not meet the growing demand. When these supplies are received, they will be pushed out on a priority basis (see MHOAC below for more information). In the meantime, in order to preserve regional and statewide supplies of PPE, we need to begin to implement contingency strategies immediately.

Testing resources are also constrained. We are receiving reports of shortages of nasopharyngeal swabs, viral transport media, as well as laboratory capacity. Turn-around times for results are increasing as testing demands are outpacing current capacity.

Actions requested:

Reduce nonessential testing for COVID-19:

- **DO NOT test symptomatic patients that can be managed at home.** With widespread community transmission, patients with symptoms of a viral respiratory illness should be presumed to have COVID-19 and instructed to isolate themselves according to DPH [home care](#) instructions. Testing mildly ill ambulatory patients usually does not change management but it depletes scarce PPE supplies and testing resources, and unnecessarily exposes other patients and healthcare personnel (HCP) to infection. It is recommended that providers test only persons with symptoms compatible with COVID-19 where a diagnostic result will change clinical management or inform public health response (see [March 19](#) LAHAN for more information).

Explanation: A single negative test in a symptomatic patient is not sufficient to discontinue isolation recommendations. A positive result only reaffirms the standing recommendation for mildly ill persons to empirically self-isolate. This recommendation will be revised to allow for broader testing once the current PPE and testing supply constraints are alleviated.

See Association of State and Territorial Health Officials statement, [COVID-19 Testing Needs to Be Limited to Priority Groups Until Sufficient Testing Supplies and Personal Protective Equipment is Available Nationwide](#).

- **Do not test asymptomatic individuals, even if they may have been exposed.** If patients know they have been exposed, they should be counseled to self-quarantine. Close contacts (household members, intimate partners, and caregivers) to a person with either suspected or confirmed COVID-19 should be provided with [home quarantine](#) instructions.

Explanation: Persons exposed to a patient with possible COVID-19 will have a negative test result if tested too soon before symptom onset. It is not possible to predict who among exposed persons will develop symptoms or when. Therefore, a negative result cannot exclude infection.

Testing for COVID-19 through PHL

- **Consider COVID-19 diagnostic testing through the DPH Public Health Lab (PHL) for patients admitted to intensive care units if your facility is experiencing substantial delays in obtaining a test result from a commercial clinical laboratory.** This recommendation is in addition to the restricted testing recommendations outlined in the [March 19](#) LAHAN. PHL aims to maintain a turnaround time of ~1-2 business days after receiving a specimen. Therefore, this recommendation will be regularly reassessed based on the volume of test requests through PHL and on the availability of COVID-19 commercial clinical laboratory capacity. Visit the [Laboratory Testing](#) section of the LAC DPH COVID-19 Provider [website](#) to see current PHL testing criteria.

Discontinue non-essential appointments, procedures, and clinics

- **Cancel non-essential medical and dental appointments that require PPE.** We encourage expanding telephone or virtual health visits for all patients who do not require in-person evaluation including those with mild respiratory symptoms. Appointments where routine immunizations are scheduled should NOT be deferred or canceled. Providers should use their judgement in determining what other visits can be delayed.
- **Discontinue elective surgical procedures** to protect the constrained supply of PPE and to free additional beds and staff to care for COVID-19 patients.
- **Close elective ambulatory clinics and consider repurposing staff and supplies to support and manage surge plans.**
See [LAC Health Officer Letter](#) (3-17-20) to Healthcare Executives and Chief Medical Officers on COVID-19 Surge Planning

Follow CDC contingency strategies for optimizing PPE

Whether your facility currently has adequate PPE supplies or is already confronting PPE supply constraints, we ask all facilities to review and immediately implement the CDC contingency capacity strategies. This will help preserve PPE supplies and ensure that patients and staff are familiar with the contingency preservation strategies for when the PPE supplies are constrained county-wide.

- **Eye Protection**
 - Shift eye protection supplies from disposable to re-usable devices (i.e., goggles and reusable face shields).
 - Implement extended use of eye protection
 - See [Contingency Capacity Strategies for Eye Protection](#) for more details.
- **Isolation Gowns**
 - Shift gown use towards cloth isolation gowns.
 - Consider use of coveralls.
 - Consider use of expired gowns beyond the manufacturer-designated shelf life for training.
 - Use gowns or coveralls conforming to international standards.
 - See [Contingency Capacity Strategies for Isolation Gowns](#) for more details.
 - If gowns are in short supply, they should be prioritized for procedures that are likely to generate respiratory aerosols
- **Facemasks**
 - Remove facemasks from public areas and place in a secure and monitored site to provide to symptomatic patients upon check in at entry points.
 - Implement extended use of facemasks.
 - See [Contingency Capacity Strategies for Facemasks](#) for more details.
- **N95 Respirators**
 - Follow the [LAC DPH Guidance for Optimizing Limited Supplies of N95 Respirators](#). This guidance was issued on March 4, 2020 and was adapted from CDC [contingency capacity strategies](#) and includes the use of N95 respirators beyond the manufacturer-designated shelf life for training and fit testings, extended use of N95 respirators, and reuse of N95 respirators.
 - Facemasks are an acceptable alternative to respirators in the setting of shortages. N95 respirators should be prioritized for procedures that generate a high concentration of respiratory aerosols.

MHOAC and Emergency Supplies

The LA County Medical and Health Operational Area Coordination (MHOAC) Program is aware that all healthcare sectors are in need of PPE and continues to request PPE supplies from the State and Federal Government. When these supplies are received, they will be pushed out on a priority basis focusing on hospitals, EMS provider agency, clinics, and long-term care facilities. There is no need to submit a resource request for PPE supplies.

New DPH Resources for Providers and Patients

The LAC DPH COVID-19 Healthcare Provider [Website](#) has new resources including the Print Materials for Patients and Facilities [webpage](#) and [FAQs](#) for Healthcare Providers.

Reporting

Los Angeles County DPH Acute Communicable Disease Control:

COVID-19 associated deaths must be reported by healthcare providers by phone or secure email immediately.

- Telephone 888-397-3993 or 213-240-7821 or complete the [Novel Coronavirus Death Report](#) form and send via secure email to COVIDdeath@ph.lacounty.gov.

Positive COVID-19 lab results from clinical labs (not PHL) must be reported by healthcare providers within one day.

- Complete a Medical Provider COVID-19 Report [form](#) and send by fax 888-397-3778 or by secure email to COVID19@ph.lacounty.gov.

Long Beach Health and Human Services:

- To report a case of COVID-19, fill out the [Long Beach COVID-19 Report Form](#) and fax the form and a copy of the positive laboratory result to 562.570.4374 or secure email to LBEpi@longbeach.gov.

Pasadena Public Health Department:

- To report a case of COVID-19, fill out the [COVID-19 Report Form](#) here and fax to 626-744-6115, **and** call 626-744-6089 [Weekdays 8am-5pm (closed every other Friday) or after hours call 626-744-6043].

Additional Resources:

- **LAC DPH COVID-19 Provider website:**
<http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/acd/ncorona2019/>
- **CDC Interim Infection Prevention and Control Recommendations for Patients with Suspected or Confirmed Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) in Healthcare Settings:** <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/infection-control/control-recommendations.html>
- **CDC Strategies of Optimizing the Supply of PPE:**
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/ppe-strategy/index.html>

This communication was sent by Sharon Balter, MD, Director, Division of Communicable Disease Control and Prevention, Los Angeles County Department of Public Health

To view this and other communications or to sign-up to receive LAHANs, please visit <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/lahan>