

# CORONAVIRUS DISEASE (COVID-19) OUTBREAK

## Update on SARS-CoV-2 Testing 24/03/2020

Since it was first identified as the cause of a cluster of people with lower respiratory tract infection in late December 2019, SARS-CoV-2 has spread to all continents, except Antarctica. On the 11<sup>th</sup> of March, the World Health Organization characterized the COVID-19 outbreak as a pandemic.

Shortly after the first case was identified in South Africa, Lancet Laboratories, in collaboration with the NICD, started offering SARS-CoV-2 testing. We follow the criteria for testing as set out by the NICD. As of the 10<sup>th</sup> of March, the criteria for testing for SARS-CoV-2 are:

Persons with acute respiratory illness with sudden onset of at least one of the following: cough, sore throat, shortness of breath or fever [ $\geq 38$  °C (measured) or history of fever (subjective)] irrespective of admission status **AND**

In the 14 days prior to onset of symptoms, met at least one of the following epidemiological criteria:

- Were in close contact with a confirmed or probable case of SARS-CoV-2 infection; **OR**
- Had a history of travel to areas with local transmission of SARS-CoV-2; **OR**
- Worked in, or attended a healthcare facility where patients with SARS-CoV-2 infections were being treated; **OR**
- Admitted with severe pneumonia of unknown aetiology

### Should asymptomatic people be tested?

Asymptomatic individuals DO NOT need routine COVID-19 testing and there is NO laboratory test that can shorten the 14-day isolation period.

The reasons for not testing asymptomatic people include:

- The benefit of testing people who may have been exposed but are still asymptomatic is still unclear.
- The sheer number of people who have travelled in the last 14 days from high-risk countries, or fear that they may have had contact with a person infected with SARS-CoV-2, could overwhelm the country's laboratory services. It would also cause delays for those in genuine need of testing (i.e. the severely ill patients in need of intensive care admission) and deplete the limited global supply of testing kits.
- With regards to returning travellers, only those who have returned to South Africa from countries with local transmission within the last 14 days **AND** who have developed some respiratory symptoms should be tested for COVID-19.

**People without symptoms do not need to be tested.** All individuals returning from high and medium risk countries are requested to self-isolate for 14 days and monitor for respiratory symptoms. Should symptoms develop, they should contact their healthcare provider to determine whether COVID-19 testing is indicated.

### Do patients need a clearance or de-isolation COVID-19 test?

Repeat COVID-19 testing is not required to confirm clearance or on completion of the 14-day self-isolation period. Mild cases can be de-isolated 14 days after the onset of symptoms, and moderate to severe cases 14 days after achieving clinical stability.

### References:

- National Institute for Communicable Diseases. Clinical management of suspected or confirmed COVID-19 disease Version 2 (19th March 2020)
- National Institute for Communicable Diseases. Advice for returning travellers. Available at: <http://www.nicd.ac.za/advice-for-returning-travellers/> (Accessed March 2020)

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