

COVID-19 Testing in Iowa FAQ – 3.14.20

What is happening with COVID-19 testing in Iowa?

More testing is becoming available each day through the State Hygienic Laboratory (SHL) and through private labs.

Your health care provider will make the determination on whether you need a test, and can consult with public health if they have questions. Testing guidance is available here: <http://shl.uiowa.edu/dcd/covid19.xml>

Additional testing resources here:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/testing.html>

How many tests are available?

As of Friday, March 13, 2020, the state lab could perform 850 tests. The state lab's capacity will increase along with private lab capacity. Health systems are also developing in-house capability for testing.

Who decides who gets a test?

Clinicians, with guidance from CDC and public health, will make those determinations and prioritize patients. See above.

How does testing work?

Testing is like getting a test for the flu. Health providers use the same supplies (nasal swab that gets put in liquid for viruses) as for flu to collect a specimen, then it is sent off to an approved lab for testing.

Labs need special testing kits to conduct the tests. More and more labs are developing this capability.

It's critical that individuals who are experiencing symptoms call ahead to their health care provider's office. Positive test results are communicated back to health care providers and IDPH. This is a mandatory order that's the same as for other reportable diseases.

Who pays for testing?

Federal resources are being announced daily to assist all Americans and the health care systems with testing.

You can find more information about federal resources as well as Medicare and Medicaid coverage here: <https://www.medicaid.gov/state-resource-center/disaster-response-toolkit/covid19/index.html>

In Iowa, tests that are sent to SHL are provided at no cost and considered a test of public health significance. Private lab testing may incur a fee. Many health insurance companies are already waiving fees for the testing if a health care provider determines that a test is needed. Check your insurance provider's webpage or hotline for your individual coverage.

How does public health use testing information?

Public health uses test results in a number of ways, including to assess whether there is community spread and levels of illness activity. This in turn is used to help provide guidance on public health actions to keep communities, schools, event organizers and others as healthy as possible.

Currently, the situation with COVID-19 is evolving in Iowa as well as around the country and the world.

As the situation changes with the virus and we see community spread, the emphasis will shift from testing to community mitigation and health system management.

I'm a health care provider, where can I find more testing resources?

IDPH has a number of ways to keep providers informed, including our webpage. In addition, health care providers can contact their hospital reference laboratory for testing availability. Find additional resources here or contact your local public health department.

<https://idph.iowa.gov/Emerging-Health-Issues/Novel-Coronavirus/Healthcare>