

Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Los Angeles County Department of Public Health Targeted Testing Guidance for Congregate Residential Facilities

Reducing the spread of COVID-19 in congregate residential settings and protecting vulnerable residents/clients, staff and service providers in these settings remains of highest priority in Los Angeles County. A Health Officer [order](#) issued on April 24, 2020 ordered all licensed congregate health care settings to take additional infection control measures to keep residents and personnel in these high-risk settings safe. This included conducting diagnostic COVID-19 testing on residents/clients and staff including those with and without symptoms, as requested or per guidance provided by the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health (LAC DPH).

In congregate residential settings that are not skilled nursing facilities, LAC DPH encourages facilities to implement a targeted testing strategy as a tool to prevent asymptomatic spread of COVID-19 within the facility. These facilities include residential care facilities for the elderly (RCFEs) and adult residential facilities (ARFs), among other residential facilities licensed under the California Community Care Licensing Division (CCLD), as well as substance use treatment centers, behavioral and mental health treatment facilities, and licensed or unlicensed group homes. Note: This guidance does not include congregate residential settings for persons experiencing homelessness or correctional facilities.

It is important to note that testing of asymptomatic residents and staff at any congregate residential site does not supersede existing infection prevention and control measures including:

- Physical distancing (keep residents and staff >6 feet apart as much as possible)
- Universal face covering for source control
- Promotion of frequent hand washing
- Environmental cleaning and disinfection of high-touch surfaces
- HVAC systems are in good working order; ventilation has been increased, where possible.
- Visitor restriction
- Limitation of communal dining and group activities
- Monitoring of staff and residents/clients for signs and symptoms of COVID-19
- Non-punitive sick leave policies that allow employees to stay home when ill and to stay home to care for sick household members. Make sure that employees are aware of these policies.
- Conducting contact investigations to identify close contacts of cases
- Isolation of suspect and confirmed cases, and quarantine of close contacts

In most situations, these measures can successfully prevent, and curb further spread of COVID-19 in a group setting.

Contact Investigation:

If a COVID-19 case is identified at a facility at any time, the facility should conduct an investigation to identify all close contacts with unprotected exposure to the case during their infectious period. A case is considered to be infectious from 48 hours before their symptoms first appeared until at least 10 days after their symptoms first appeared and at least 3 days after recovery from symptoms, defined as resolution of fever and improvement in respiratory symptoms. Asymptomatic persons with laboratory confirmed COVID-19 are considered infectious from 48 hours prior to the date of their first positive molecular test (sometimes referred

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to as a PCR test) until at least 10 days after the initial positive PCR test, barring the development of symptoms.

A close contact is any individual (resident/client or staff) within the facility with the following exposures to a case while the case was infectious:

- Presence within 6 feet of the case for more than 15 minutes without wearing a medical facemask*.
- Unprotected contact with the infected person's body fluids and/or secretions, for example, being coughed or sneezed on, sharing utensils or saliva.

*Wearing a cloth face covering is not reliable protection from COVID-19. Cloth face coverings are worn as source control-to keep a person from transmitting the virus to others.

All symptomatic contacts are considered cases and should be isolated and tested for COVID-19. Asymptomatic close contacts should be placed in quarantine for 14 days from exposure. Staff instructed to self-isolate or self-quarantine who cannot work remotely should be given paid sick leave. Specific guidance on implementation of isolation and quarantine in residential congregate settings is available here:

<http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/media/coronavirus/docs/settings/GuidanceCongregateLiving-English.pdf>

Targeted Testing:

Under this strategy, all asymptomatic close contacts of a COVID-19 case are also tested. If testing identifies additional asymptomatic cases, a new contact investigation is initiated around the new case to identify, isolate, and test their close contacts. This protocol is repeated for each identified case at the facility.

In situations where contact investigation cannot be appropriately conducted such as in memory care units, the entire unit may be considered exposed and unit-wide testing can be arranged to identify additional cases that would require isolation.

Role of Targeted Testing:

It is important to consider the pros and cons of targeted testing and to understand how targeted testing will and will not affect case management.

Targeted testing may help:

- Identify unrecognized asymptomatic COVID-positive residents/clients and staff that may be associated with the COVID-19 case at the site
- Provide additional information to understand the scope of COVID-19 spread at the facility and guide decision making regarding selecting residents/clients and staff for isolation and quarantine at a given point in time
- Provide a strategic, structured, manageable, and efficient testing approach within a facility compared to facility-wide testing. Facility-wide testing is conducted by LAC DPH in select high-risk outbreak settings that serve medically vulnerable clients, primarily in SNFs and homeless shelters



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Targeted testing does not, however:

- Eliminate the need for investigation to determine who has had contact with a case or for quarantine of close contacts.
- Inform whether a close contact to a COVID-19 case will develop disease. Testing provides information at a single point-in-time and a person who tests negative during the incubation period (i.e. time period between exposure to disease onset) may subsequently develop disease. In other words, identified close contacts will need to quarantine/ take appropriate precautions for the full 14 day recommended period even if testing is negative

High-risk Congregate Residential Settings:

LAC DPH analyzed recent COVID-19 outbreaks in congregate residential facilities in LA County to identify criteria that would indicate a congregate residential facility as high-risk for an outbreak with poor outcomes. Preliminary analysis showed that high-risk congregate residential facilities are those that primarily serve residents older than 65 years of age with at least one of the following:

- A memory care unit or at least 25% residents with dementia or severe mental illness diagnosis
- Residents who are non-ambulatory
- Residents who require regular direct on-site clinical care

Analysis of recent outbreaks showed that facilities with these characteristics were associated with a higher average number of cases, hospitalizations, and/or deaths in residents.

Caregiving Congregate Residential Setting:

This is defined as a facility that provides some level of care to residents including but not limited to medication administration, assistance with activities of daily living, counselling or group therapy.

Outbreak Classification:

In caregiving congregate residential settings, LAC DPH will initiate an outbreak investigation when:

- At least 2 lab-confirmed cases of symptomatic or asymptomatic COVID-19 (including residents and/or staff) have been identified within a 14-day period.

In high-risk congregate residential settings, LAC DPH will initiate an outbreak investigation when:

- At least 1 lab-confirmed case of symptomatic or asymptomatic COVID-19 has been identified in a resident, OR
- The setting meets outbreak criteria for caregiving settings above.

Outbreak Response:

Once an outbreak is identified at a congregate facility, LAC DPH will initiate an outbreak response at the site which includes providing infection control guidance and recommendations, technical support and site-specific control measures. A Public Health Nurse will be assigned to the outbreak investigation to help guide the facility response. Facilities should immediately report outbreaks to the public health department so that a

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response can be mobilized in a timely fashion. An outbreak should be reported by calling the LAC DPH Acute Communicable Disease Control program at 213-240-7941 from 8:00am-5:00pm, Monday through Friday. For time-sensitive questions after hours, call 213-974-1234 to reach the on-call clinician.

The recommended testing strategy after outbreak identification at a congregate residential site may continue to be targeted. Facility-wide testing may be recommended by LAC DPH depending on the ability of the facility to implement infection control measures, the scope of the outbreak, and if wider testing will change outbreak response. In some situations, repeat testing may be recommended at weekly intervals until no further cases are identified for 2 weeks. Testing recommendations will be made after discussion and joint-decision making with the facility.

Active Surveillance:

Active surveillance (i.e. testing a random sample of residents weekly before an outbreak is identified) is currently not recommended in non-SNF congregate residential facilities. It is unclear at this time whether the active surveillance strategy would provide additional prevention benefit compared to existing infection prevention and control measures with the addition of the targeted strategy described above.

Entry Testing:

COVID-19 testing prior to admission is not required. LAC DPH has developed guidelines for admission or readmission to congregate residential settings from hospital or other residential facilities (see: <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/acd/NCorona2019/InterfacilityTransferRules.htm>)

Given ongoing community transmission of COVID-19 in LAC, all new admissions should ideally be placed in quarantine for 14 days after admission to a congregate residential facility and monitored for symptoms/signs of COVID-19 illness during this period. If an admission test is performed and results negative, the new admit will still need to be quarantined as above as the test can be negative during the 14-day incubation period of illness.

Testing Resources:

Facilities should make every effort to gain access to adequate testing by making arrangements with commercial laboratories conducting validated SARS-CoV2 virus PCR diagnostic testing with an FDA emergency use authorization. Antibody test results should not be used to diagnose someone with an active SARS-CoV-2 infection. Staff and residents (who can do so) can be referred to their own primary care providers to obtain testing. However, each facility should have a plan to test all staff and residents who are not able to test through other mechanisms. Some commercial labs can provide testing resources as well as staff to conduct on-site testing at the facility. Public health support can be provided to facilities with no resources (access to medically trained staff) to test on their own, however, given the widespread community presence of COVID-19, testing through DPH is prioritized based on risk assessment as well as available resources and capacity.

Once a facility has been assigned a Public Health Nurse as part of the outbreak investigation, LAC DPH will guide the response and outline the testing strategy with facility leadership, including site-specific medical personnel. With a testing strategy, guidance on partnering with a commercial laboratory and medically trained



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staff to conduct testing, while continuing to consistently follow the recommended infection prevention and control measures, facilities will be appropriately supported to effectively utilize available testing resources and implement ongoing outbreak control.

Additional Information:

Detailed guidance on infection control recommendations, case management and cohorting of residents/clients (separating cases, exposed and unexposed persons) is available on the LAC DPH website. See links below:

- <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/media/coronavirus/docs/settings/GuidanceCongregateLiving-English.pdf>
- http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/media/coronavirus/docs/settings/Quarantine_vs_Isolation.pdf
- <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/media/coronavirus/docs/settings/GuidanceBedPositions.pdf>

