MEMORANDUM

TO: Local Health Departments & Regional Offices of the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH), Hospital Laboratories, Hospital Administrators, PIOs, ED Personnel, Nursing Directors, EMS Staff, Laboratory Staff, ID/INEDSS, EMS Partners and IL Local EMAs

FROM: E. Matt Charles
Chief, Division of Laboratories

DATE: March 26, 2020

SUBJECT: Submission of COVID-19 Samples to IDPH Lab and Expanded Testing Hours

The Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) Division of Laboratories is expanding testing for COVID-19 at all three of its laboratories to include a second testing shift that will run until 10 pm. Below contains updated guidance for specimen testing at IDPH Laboratories. PLEASE READ CAREFULLY

Submission Guidelines:
The IDPH Division of Laboratories will accept specimens from the following patients unless other arrangements have been made:

• Specimens from hospitalized patients with severe acute lower respiratory illness (e.g., pneumonia)
• Specimens from clusters in a congregate setting that serves more vulnerable populations such as a supportive care facility, assisted living facility, group home, homeless shelter, or correctional setting
• Specimens from symptomatic healthcare workers or first responders.

Authorization:
Submitting facilities must ensure they have an authorization number prior to sending the specimens and it must be clearly labeled on the request form. IDPH Lab is implementing a new test request form that can be filled in electronically and printed for submission. It can be found here. We are currently working on a future enhancement that will allow submission information to be transmitted electronically into our database. The submitting facility must contact their local health department to receive the authorization number or request authorization using the online service found here.

Acceptable Media Types:
The U.S. Food and Drug Administration recently released additional media types that may be used as alternatives for universal transport media (UTM) or viral transport media (VTM), due to a nationwide shortage. A list of acceptable media types can be found in this FAQ here, under “What If I Do Not
Have...?

The Division of Laboratories will continue to send collection and transport supplies for COVID-19 testing performed at IDPH Labs to providers on a limited basis due to this nationwide shortage. The Supply Request form can be found here.

Laboratory Testing and Receiving Times and Dates:
The IDPH Division of Laboratories is adding second shift to handle an expected increase in testing volume as this outbreak continues. Staff covering this shift will concentrate on testing only. Sample receipt will continue to be restricted to 7 days a week from 8:00 am to 4:30 pm. The laboratory will not be accepting specimens outside of this timeframe unless special provisions have been made with lab staff in advance.

Laboratory Turn Around Time (TAT):
The turn-around time is up to 3 days. The turn-around time has increased due to the substantial increase in specimens across all laboratories. The laboratory is unable to prioritize any specimen and they will be processed and tested in the order received.

Acceptable Sample Types:
While nasopharyngeal swabs remain the preferred specimen, the CDC has expanded the acceptable sample types to include nasal swabs. The IDPH Division of Laboratories will continue to accept only one sample per patient to conserve testing supplies. We will begin accepting all samples that are approved by the EUA due to the worldwide shortage of Viral Transport Medium (VTM). A list of acceptable samples can be found here.