

COVID-19 FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



Q: Who should undergo COVID-19/SARS-CoV-2 testing?

Only patients who meet the current NICD criteria for COVID-19 testing.

Q: What is the current NICD criteria for COVID-19 testing?

- Persons with acute respiratory illness with sudden onset of at least one of the following:
 - A new cough
 - Sore throat
 - Shortness of breath
 - Fever [$\geq 38^{\circ}\text{C}$ (measured) or history of fever (subjective)]

AND

- In the 14 days prior to onset of symptoms, have 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; (NB Affected countries will change with time, consult the NICD and WHO website for current updates – see <http://www.nicd.ac.za/diseases-a-z-index/covid-19/daily-updates-of-countries/> and <https://www.who.int>);OR
 - Worked in, or attended a health care facility where patients with SARS-CoV-2 infections were being treatedOR
 - Admitted to hospital with severe pneumonia of unknown aetiology

Q: What is “close contact” with a COVID-19 case?

Close contact is face-to-face contact or being in a closed environment with a person diagnosed with COVID-19; this includes

- all persons living in the same household as a person diagnosed with COVID-19
- people working closely in the same environment as a person diagnosed with COVID-19
- a healthcare worker or other person providing direct care to someone suffering from COVID-19, while not wearing recommended personal protective equipment or PPE (e.g., gowns, gloves, NIOSH-certified disposable N95 respirator, eye protection)
- a contact in an aircraft sitting within two seats (in any direction) of the infected individual
- travel companions or persons providing care
- crew members serving in the section of the aircraft where the person diagnosed with COVID-19 was seated

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Q: When 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.

See: “Clarification on the testing of asymptomatic persons travelling from high-risk areas” available from the NICD website at <http://www.nicd.ac.za/advice-for-returning-travellers/>

- 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 could overwhelm the country’s laboratory services. It would also cause delays for those in genuine need of testing and deplete the limited global supply of testing kits.
- 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-quarantine for 14 days and monitor for respiratory symptoms. Should symptoms develop, they should present for testing.

Q: What do I need in order to get tested for COVID-19?

A healthcare provider must request the COVID-19 test using the COVID-19 request form.

Please use the following link to access the most recent request form:

<http://www.lancet.co.za/corona-virus-info-hub/>

Q: How long will results from a COVID-19 test take?

Results will be released within 72 hours of the sample reaching the laboratory in Johannesburg.

Unforeseen circumstances, e.g. a sudden increase in sample volumes, transport or logistical issues may in lead to a longer time to results.

Q: How will the results from a COVID-19 test be communicated?

Testing results will be automatically released through the routine Lancet resulting system, including the Lancet mobile app, Path Portal and the Patient Portal.

All positive results will immediately be communicated to the referring healthcare worker who is responsible for contacting the patient. A Lancet pathologist may also contact the patient directly if the referring health care worker cannot be reached.

Kindly note that the information on this page is subject to change – updated 17/3/2020

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Q: Should all testing not be done via the NICD?

No. Private laboratories are actively involved in the country's expanded testing programme.

Lancet pathologists are in constant communication with the NICD and advocate responsible testing in accordance with current NICD guidelines.

All positive results are reported to the NICD and are included in the official COVID-19 statistics for South Africa. Contact tracing is done by the NICD and Department of Health.

The referring healthcare worker will be required to complete the NICD person under investigation form if his/her patient test positive for SARS-CoV-2. The form is available from:

http://www.nicd.ac.za/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/COVID_19_PUI_Form_v3_Contact_list_v5_Elect.pdf

Q: Where can I go to be tested?

Please refer to the Lancet Coronavirus Information Hub to access the list of Lancet testing sites:

<http://www.lancet.co.za/corona-virus-info-hub/>

Please avoid emergency units and hospitals if you are not acutely ill. Some hospitals may refuse walk in entry to a person with symptoms compatible with COVID-19; in addition, patients who do not need acute emergency care will be directed to offsite testing centres. This is to protect the in-hospital patients from COVID-19 infection.

Lancet are piloting drive-through and parking lot pop-up COVID-19 testing spots for patients with a doctor's referral form. Additional sites will be deployed as the need arise.

Q: What do I do if I have flu-like symptoms and think I have been exposed to COVID-19?

Based on your symptoms, do the following:

If you're concerned you have COVID-19, we recommend you start by calling your general practitioner. They will advise you about what to do next. You can also call the National Coronavirus Toll-Free Hotline at 0800 029 999.

You should call ahead before going in person to any healthcare facility. This will allow the healthcare workers to prepare themselves by wearing personal protective clothing.

If you have chest pain, shortness of breath, dizziness, a severe headache or other potentially severe symptoms, go directly to the nearest emergency unit.

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Q: What must I do if I return from a high-risk country or if I have been exposed to a confirmed case of COVID-19?

Exposed individuals or returning travellers should self-quarantine for 14 days.

See: <http://www.nicd.ac.za/advice-for-returning-travellers/> (updated on 17 March 2020)

Guidelines for self-quarantine are available at: <http://www.nicd.ac.za/diseases-a-z-index/covid-19/> and http://www.nicd.ac.za/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Clinical_management_of_suspected_or_acute_COVID_V1.1_13.03.20_updated.pdf

Q: Do I need a clearance test after I have completed the 14-day self-quarantine period?

No laboratory testing is needed for ASYMPTOMATIC individuals who have completed the 14-day period of self-quarantine.

Q: Do I need a clearance or deisolation test if I was infected with COVID-19?

Patients with COVID-19 can be discharged home or deisolated provided they meet ALL of the following criteria:

- There are no medical indications for hospital admission.
- The patient's symptoms have improved or resolved. (Note: full recovery can take several weeks, especially in severe cases. It is not necessary for every symptom to have completely resolved prior to discharge, only that there has been sustained improvement).
- The patient has two consecutive negative nasopharyngeal PCR tests, performed at least 24 – 48 hours apart.

Refer to the "Clinical management of suspected or confirmed COVID-19 disease" guidelines, available from: http://www.nicd.ac.za/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Clinical_management_of_suspected_or_acute_COVID_V1.1_13.03.20_updated.pdf

Q: Are there any additional testing that must be done together with a COVID-19 test?

A COVID-19 test can be requested as a stand-alone test.

Additional testing may be requested by the referring doctor if clinically indicated, e.g. a respiratory viral screen, pneumonia infectious disease panel, or bacterial culture.

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Q: What sample is collected for a COVID-19 test?

A nasopharyngeal swab (a swab collected through the nose) is most commonly obtained. A dry swab must be used. The swab must not be placed in gel or viral transport medium.

An oropharyngeal swab (a deep throat swab collected through the mouth) can be collected if a nasopharyngeal swab cannot be obtained.

A lower respiratory tract sample is preferred for hospitalised patients.

Samples will be transported according to Lancet's protocol.