

March 6, 2020

Dear Colleagues,

The Tennessee Department of Health (TDH) is providing this update regarding the COVID-19 (novel coronavirus) outbreak.

### **1. Assessment of patients with acute respiratory illness in Tennessee**

As you likely know, TDH announced the first presumptive case of COVID-19 in Tennessee yesterday. There is no evidence of widespread community transmission at this time. We are continuing to see influenza and other influenza-like-illnesses circulating at high levels in Tennessee, creating a high volume of patients with respiratory disease who need medical evaluation. It is critically important that patients with these symptoms continue to access care through normal outpatient channels, such as primary care offices, urgent care clinics, and walk-in clinics.

Although the current infection control guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends conservative measures (including use of airborne precautions) for evaluation of a possible PUI, evidence supports that the primary mode of transmission for COVID-19 is droplet spread. We have been advised by CDC that they are actively updating their infection control guidance, and we anticipate those updates being shared soon. We encourage all clinicians to use appropriate precautions (standard, contact, and droplet precautions with use of eye protection), when evaluating patients with respiratory symptoms. The initial triage, clinical assessment, and testing of patients with acute respiratory disease (including suspected COVID-19) can be completed safely in any healthcare setting.

As always, we encourage that any patient with respiratory symptoms should be provided a mask upon entry to a clinical setting, and be placed in a private exam room promptly.

### **2. Increasing laboratory capacity for COVID-19 testing**

Multiple commercial laboratories are in the process of finalizing procedures to onboard an assay for the virus causing COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2). We expect that several of these laboratories may have testing capacity as early as this week. Please liaise with your organizational leadership to ensure access to these commercial laboratories for testing as soon as possible.

Please note: COVID-19 is currently an immediately reportable condition in Tennessee. Laboratory-confirmed cases can be reported to TDH by calling 615-741-7247.

### **3. Preferred specimens for COVID-19 testing**

Complete specimen collection guidance can be accessed on the TDH COVID-19 website (<https://www.tn.gov/health/cedep/ncov.html>). Please note: the preferred specimens are an oropharyngeal and nasopharyngeal swab.

#### **4. Updated CDC returning traveler guidance**

CDC has released updated [guidance](#) regarding travelers returning to the United States from international locations.

- Travelers returning from a country with a level 3 CDC travel warning (currently China, Iran, Italy, and South Korea) should stay home for 14 days after returning to the United States and practice social distancing.
- Travelers returning from a country with a level 2 CDC travel alert (Japan) should limit contact with others and monitor their health for 14 days after returning to the United States.

#### **5. CDC Clinician Outreach & Communication Activity (COCA) Call from March 5, 2020.**

CDC recorded an updated COCA call yesterday entitled "[Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) Update—What Clinicians Need to Know to Prepare for COVID-19 in the United States](#)". A recording of the call and presentations are available [here](#).

Please share this message widely with healthcare partners. You can continue to access up-to-date information on the [COVID-19 website](#) including a [TDH weekly situation summary](#).

Thank you for all that you do in keeping Tennesseans safe and healthy.  
Tennessee Department of Health