

Houston Health Department (HHD) Laboratory 2019-nCoV In-House Testing Specimen Submission Guidelines (Rev. 3-10-20)

1. If your facility has a Persons Under Investigation (PUI) case for 2019-nCoV, please always call your local or state health department epidemiology first. The contact information for the Health Departments in the region is at the end of this document.
2. Your local (or state) health department epidemiologist (EPI) will coordinate the investigation and inform you whether 2019-nCoV testing is approved. If it is approved, a Persons Under Investigation (PUI) ID number will be issued to you. **The submitter must include the PUI ID number, the name and contact number of the EPI who investigates the case, and the name of the health department on the Houston Health Department Laboratory 2019-nCoV Specimen Submission Form (One form per specimen with all required information filled out, otherwise specimens cannot be tested. Only MR# and Race are optional).** This is the only required submission form. PUI form and CDC 50.34 Form are no longer required.
3. **Please always call the lab number 832-393-3959 for all your inquiries.** We now have designated staff who can help you.
4. The laboratory regular operation hours are Monday to Friday, 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM. The HHD laboratory contact number is **832-393-3959** (if needed, the supervisor's office number is 832-393-3956) and the lab fax number is 832-393-3982. Testing outside of the regular hours may occur pending on risk assessment by the health department EPI for high consequence public health cases. Operation outside of regular hours, if occurs, normally will be 9:00 AM to 4:00 PM. Contact is the same lab number **832-393-3959**. For high risk situations during non-regular hours and you cannot reach anyone through the lab number, you may contact Meilan Bielby's cellphone at 832-260-6723 or Minghong Zheng's cellphone at 713-805-6673.
5. **Timing of specimen collection:** Specimens should be collected as soon as possible after onset of illness, preferably within the first 3-4 days. Although some viruses may be detected after longer time periods, the likelihood of recovering most respiratory viruses diminishes after 3-4 days.
6. Health care personnel collecting clinical samples from potentially infectious patients should follow CDC infection prevention and control [recommendations](#) (available at CDC website). Sample processing should be performed in at least a Class II biological safety cabinet following a minimum of biosafety level 2 guidelines. Please refer to the CDC website for specimen handling biosafety guidelines: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/lab/lab-biosafety-guidelines.html>
7. Follow CDC specimen collection guidelines for collecting specimens: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/lab/guidelines-clinical-specimens.html>
8. **Specimen types:** HHD lab is currently requesting Nasopharyngeal swab AND oropharyngeal swab (NP/OP swab) specimens on all persons under investigation (PUI). Place swabs immediately into sterile tubes containing 2-3 ml of viral transport media. **NP and OP specimens may be combined at collection into a single vial** or kept in separate vials. Sputum specimens are optional for PUIs with productive cough (no need to induce). Collect 2-3 mL into a sterile, leak-proof, screw-cap sputum collection cup or sterile dry container.

9. Swab specimens should be collected using only swabs with a synthetic tip (e.g., polyester, Dacron®) and an aluminum or plastic shaft. Swabs with cotton tips and wooden shafts are not recommended. Specimens collected with swabs made of calcium alginate are not acceptable.
- 10. Each specimen must be labeled with: A) name of the patient; B) date of birth of the patient; C) specimen type; D) date of collection; E) PUI ID number assigned to the patient by EPI, and F) a unique identifier assigned to the patient if available.**
11. **Refrigerate all specimens promptly after collection.** If specimens can be received at HHD lab within 72 hours of collection, they should be kept refrigerated at 4°C and shipped on gel ice-packs. Freezing should be avoided if possible, as this will reduce virus viability. If specimens cannot be received at HHD lab within 72 hours of collection, they should be promptly frozen at -70°C and shipped on dry ice. Samples should be collected and processed in a manner that prevents cross-contamination between specimens, including changing gloves between specimens.
12. A properly filled (print clearly with all information requested) **Houston Health Department 2019-nCoV Specimen Submission Form** must accompany **each specimen** (not each patient).
13. Before you deliver 2019-CoV specimens to HHD lab, call HHD lab first. Refer to the contact information under 4. of this document.
- 14. A person who has been trained in Packaging and Shipping of Infectious Substances with a current training certificate should perform the packaging.** Specimens should be packaged and shipped as Biological Substance, Category B. For specific instructions, see the “Packing, Shipping, and Transport” section from this CDC webpage document (**last section**):
<http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/mers/guidelines-lab-biosafety.html>
Refer to “UN 3373 Category B schematic for packaging” here:
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/mers/downloads/lab/UN3373-packaging-schema.pdf>
15. All specimens must be prepacked to prevent breakage and spillage. Specimen containers should be sealed with Parafilm® and placed in ziplock bags. Place enough absorbent material in the Secondary Container (containing Primary Container).
- 16. Place all submission forms (one submission form per specimen) between the Styrofoam box and the outer box, not inside the pouch of the biohazard bag containing the specimen tubes.**
17. Keep specimens at 4°C and **ship 2019-nCoV specimens separately (from other specimens for other tests) on gel ice-packs using a Category B shipper to HHD lab with this label on the outside of the specimen package: ATTN: Molecular-2019-nCoV, 2250 Holcombe Blvd, Houston, TX 77030, and within 24 hours (not to exceed 48 hours) of collection if possible.**
18. Results should be available within 24-48 hours after specimens are received at HHD lab. Specimen submission volume, staffing status, etc., may affect turnaround time.
19. Results will be faxed to the fax number provided on the submission form. The health department EPI and submitter will be immediately notified by phone for any positive results.



Houston Area Health Departments

Harris County Public Health

Telephone: (713) 439-6000

Fax: (713) 439-6306

After Hours: (713) 755-5000

<http://publichealth.harriscountytx.gov/>

Houston Health Department

Telephone: (832) 393-5080 (24 hr #)

Fax: (832) 393-5232

www.houstontx.gov/health/index.html

Texas Department of State Health Services

Health Service Region 6/5 South

Telephone: (713) 767-3000

Fax: (713) 767-3006

After Hours: (800) 270-3128

www.dshs.state.tx.us/region6-5/default.shtm

Galveston County Health District

Telephone: (409) 938-2322

Fax: (409) 938-2399

After Hours: (888) 241-0442

www.qchd.org

Montgomery County Public Health Department

Telephone: (936) 523-5026

Fax: (936) 539-9272

After Hours: (888) 825-9754

<https://mcphd-tx.org>

Fort Bend County Health and Human Services

Telephone: (281) 342-6414

Fax: (281) 342-7371

After Hours: (281) 434-6494

www.fortbendcountyhhs.com

Brazoria County Health Department

Telephone: (979) 864-2168

Fax: (979) 864-3694

After Hours: (800) 511-1632

www.publichealthmatters.net

Chambers County Health Department

Telephone: (409) 267-2730

Fax: (409) 267-4276

After Hours: (409) 267-9862

https://www.co.chambers.tx.us/page/health_department

Beaumont Public Health Document

Telephone: 409-654-3603

FAX: 409-832-4270

After Hours: 409-998-3389

sherry.ulmer@beaumonttexas.gov

Port Arthur Public Health Department

Telephone: 409-983-8832

Judith.smith@portarthurtx.gov

Hardin County Health Department/Orange County

Telephone: (409)209-5363

Fax: (409)246-4373 or (409)246-5263

After Hours: (409)659-7759

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