
COVID-19 Update

2 April 2020

COVID-19 and Community Collection Centres

Laboratories are working hard to protect phlebotomists and patients from COVID-19 in collection centres. Phlebotomists are front-line healthcare workers who are doing their best to provide a service to patients who need blood tests.

Our phlebotomists do not have the ability to make a diagnosis or exclude disease. Therefore, under current circumstances it is prudent to consider that all patients presenting with upper or lower respiratory tract symptoms and/or a fever may have COVID-19.

Therefore, in line with other laboratories (hospital and community) in the region and nationally we have instituted screening questions to identify potential COVID-19 patients.

Patients answering “Yes” to any of the screening questions, or who refuse to answer the questions or who we reasonably assess have symptoms despite answering “No”, **will not be admitted to the collection centres.**

These patients will be advised to contact their referrer. Patients may develop symptoms between being given the request form and presenting at the collection centre, these patients will also be referred back to their doctor.

The referrer may determine that the test can be deferred until the patient is symptom-free or arrange for samples to be collected at the medical centre (where appropriate PPE should be available). If this is not possible and the test is considered urgent, a request for home visits will be triaged by our pathologists.

We would also like to re-iterate that only testing that affects immediate clinical management should be performed during Alert Level 4. This will reduce risk to patients, and risk and workload upon the phlebotomists. It will also help mitigate loss of phlebotomy workforce to illness which will further stretch resources.

We rely on your clinical judgment and professional support to be able to provide the best possible service in these difficult times.

Swab Requirements for COVID-19 testing

We are still receiving requests to supply COVID-19 swabs. Please be advised that Labtests and Northland Pathology do not supply the swabs for COVID-19 testing. There is a central distribution system now in place for all PPE and the COVID-19 swabs – these are being managed through your PHOs.

The PHOs are working on your behalf to obtain the relevant supplies so the best course of action is to contact your PHO to obtain what you need.
