



Republic of the Philippines
Department of Health
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

July 6, 2020

DEPARTMENT CIRCULAR

No. 2020- 0319

TO : ALL REGIONAL DIRECTORS, HEADS OF HOSPITALS AND OTHER HEALTH FACILITIES, CHIEFS OF THE HEALTH FACILITIES AND SERVICES REGULATORY BUREAU AND THE CENTERS FOR HEALTH DEVELOPMENT – REGULATION, LICENSING AND ENFORCEMENT DIVISION, MINISTRY OF HEALTH OF THE BANGSAMORO AUTONOMOUS REGION IN MUSLIM MINDANAO (MOH-BARMM), REGULATORY OFFICERS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS CONCERNED

SUBJECT : Guidelines for the Remote Specimen Collection for SARS-CoV-2 Detection Conducted by the COVID-19 Testing Laboratories

Department Memorandum No. 2020-0324, dated July 8, 2020, titled “Mandatory Notification of Remote Collection Activity of COVID-19 Testing Laboratories”, sets the general guidelines in the conduct of remote specimen collection.

To ensure that these COVID-19 Testing Laboratories carry out each essential step of the pre-analytical procedure appropriately, guidelines stated herein shall be strictly followed:

I. PERSONNEL

- 1) Any of the following properly trained personnel may do the swabbing:
 - a) From the DOH-licensed COVID-19 testing laboratory: Registered Nurses (RNs), Registered Medical Technologists (RMTs), Licensed Physicians
 - b) Duly authorized/designated personnel by the COVID-19 laboratory.
- 2) All authorized personnel who will collect the specimen shall undergo NPS/OPS training from the Research Institute for Tropical Medicine (RITM) or from other recognized training providers of the DOH. They shall also adhere to the protocols stated in Department Circular No. 2020-0204, “Advisory on Specimen Collection of Nasopharyngeal and Oropharyngeal Swabs in Swabbing Center.”
- 3) Full personal protective equipment (PPE) which include but not limited to surgical hair cover, long sleeves fluid repellent isolation gown, face shield or goggles, respirator (at least N95), disposable single use surgical gloves, shoe cover, shall be worn by the authorized specimen collector.

II. PHYSICAL PLANT

- 1) Remote collection site shall have an adequate and well-ventilated space for specimen collection. Physical distancing shall be observed in the waiting area at all times.
- 2) The collection or swabbing must be done in an area where foot traffic is less or controlled.

III. EQUIPMENT / SUPPLIES

The following are the minimum supplies/equipment needed for the remote specimen collection:

- 1) Virus Transport Medium (VTM) / Universal Transport Medium (UTM)
- 2) For Nasopharyngeal swab: sterile dacron/rayon /flocked-tip swab with pliable plastic shaft
- 3) For Oropharyngeal swab: sterile dacron/rayon swab/flocked-tip swab with pliable plastic shaft - tongue depressor
- 4) Test tube rack
- 5) Laboratory sealing film (parafilm)
- 6) Cotton or any absorbent material
- 7) Resealable plastic bag / leak-proof plastic container
- 8) Permanent tube marker
- 9) Scissors
- 10) PPE (gloves, respirator (N95 mask), face shields or goggles, disposable gown, surgical hair cover, shoe cover, etc.)
- 11) Portable refrigerator or transport box
- 12) Ice packs / gel packs / cold packs – sufficient to sustain temperature of 2°C to 8°C.

IV. SPECIMEN HANDLING AND TRANSPORT


- 1) Specimen and the Case Investigation Form (CIF) shall be placed in a sealed plastic. This shall be handled and transported properly.
- 2) Specimens with incomplete CIF shall not be accepted by the receiving laboratories.
- 3) Each specimen shall be placed in a Virus Transport Medium (VTM) or Universal Transport Medium (UTM), immediately after collection.
- 4) Specimen shall be stored in a portable refrigerator or in a transport box with temperature maintained at 2°C to 8°C, at all times, while awaiting transport to the main DOH licensed COVID-19 laboratory.
- 5) Specimens shall be transported to the DOH licensed COVID-19 laboratory within 48 hours after collection.

V. RECORDS

- 1) Completely accomplished Case Investigation Forms shall be immediately encoded to the digital platform developed by the DOH and shall then be filed properly.
- 2) There shall be records of temperature monitoring of refrigerator or transport box during remote collection activities.
- 3) The COVID-19 testing laboratory shall maintain records of all remote collection performed.

For information and guidance.

By Authority of the Secretary of Health:


MARIA ROSARIO SINGH-VERGEIRE, MD, MPH, CESO IV
Undersecretary of Health
Health Regulation Team