

Please test or refer for testing ALL patients with ANY respiratory symptoms (even mild), including rhinorrhoea, fever, cough, sore throat or shortness of breath.

Other reported symptoms of COVID-19 include: loss of smell, loss of taste, muscle pain, joint pain, diarrhoea, nausea/vomiting and loss of appetite. Please assess patients with these symptoms before referring for testing.

Advice to GPs from the Director of Public Health is that patients who meet epidemiological criteria for a suspect case should be referred through a THS respiratory clinic.

To ensure timely COVID-19 test results for these high-risk groups, please ask patients the following screening questions:

- **Are you a healthcare, aged care or residential care worker or other healthcare worker with direct patient contact?**
- **In the 14 days prior to illness onset:**
 - **Have you had close contact with a confirmed or probable case?**
 - **Have you travelled internationally or interstate?**
 - **Were you a passenger or crew member who travelled on a cruise ship?**

Refer suspect cases for testing through THS Respiratory Clinics

Refer patients with respiratory symptoms who do not meet the suspect case definition above to THS Respiratory Clinics, GP-led Respiratory Clinics or collect the sample yourself.

For testing in Aged Care Facilities please see over page.

See [Tasmanian HealthPathways](#) (username: connectingcare / password: health).

What do if you suspect COVID-19 in a patient

1. Instruct the patient to self-isolate at home while waiting for their appointment to be tested. Emphasise the importance of physical distancing, hand hygiene and cough etiquette.
2. Place a surgical mask on the patient, ask them to use alcohol-based hand rub and move to a single room.
3. Minimise the number of staff in close contact with the patient.
4. Use **contact and droplet** precautions (unless symptoms are severe and except for aerosol-generating procedures). Don Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) (surgical mask, gloves, disposable gown, eye protection), as per the [Personal protective equipment for contact and droplet precautions](#). For more information see the Australian Government [Revised advice on non-inpatient care of people with suspected or confirmed COVID-19, including use of personal protective equipment \(PPE\)](#).
5. Prepare the referral form for testing and fax it to the local THS Respiratory Clinic. The Clinic will contact the patient to arrange the appointment time. Alternatively the patient can make an appointment, or be assisted to make an appointment, at a GP-led Clinic (a referral is not required).
6. Give the patient:
 - **the fact sheet 'I'm being tested for coronavirus, what do I need to know?' V3 (updated)**
 - **the fact sheet 'How to use facemasks safely'**
 - **three unused, packaged surgical masks** for the patient to wear, to protect others:
 - one to wear when leaving your consultation room to go straight to home for home quarantine
 - one to wear while travelling to the specimen collection centre for testing
 - one to wear when returning home after specimen collection.

Package spare masks in a zip-lock bag (eg a specimen bag) to prevent contamination from the patient's belongings and general patient handling. This is important to reduce the risk of community transmission.
7. After the consultation, remove PPE, place in a biohazard container, perform hand hygiene. Contaminated and contacted surfaces must be wiped with detergent/disinfectant by a person wearing PPE.
8. For patients tested through a THS clinic, negative results will be provided by the THS Central Hub. GPs are advised of test results if referred through private laboratories, please advise patients of their test results as per normal processes. If the result is positive, Public Health Services will also contact the patient as a priority. If the result is negative, the THS COVID-19 Referral Hub will also send a text message to the patient to advise the result. For patients tested through a GP-led respiratory clinic, results will be provided to patients by the clinic. If the result is positive, Public Health Services will also contact the patient. Their usual GP will be copied into the test results.

9. If the test result is negative, patients can cease self-isolation unless they need to be in quarantine because:
- a. They are within 14 days of close contact with a confirmed case.
 - b. They have been instructed by Public Health Services to quarantine because of potential exposure.
 - c. They are within 14 days of arriving in Tasmania.

For testing in residential aged care facilities (RACF)

Call the Sonic Healthcare (Hobart, Launceston, and North West Pathology) COVID-19 hotline on 1800 570 573 (operating from 8:00am – 6:00pm). After hours, initiate appropriate precautions and call the following morning.

The Sonic Healthcare RACF COVID-19 Collection Coordinator will arrange delivery of the required number of specimen collection kits to the RACF. The kits include detailed specimen collection instructions, swabs and specimen transport bags. (For facilities that are remote from the major centres – Hobart, Launceston and Burnie – a small number of specimen collection packs [2–3 depending on the size of the facility] will be provided to be on hand to facilitate urgent testing if required.)

Collect the specimen following instructions for specimen collection in suspected COVID-19 cases, including using appropriate PPE.

Complete the pathology form with request for 'COVID-19, influenza and other respiratory viruses'. Write on the form that the patient meets criteria for COVID-19 testing and include the treating GP's details.

The Sonic Healthcare RACF COVID-19 Collection Coordinator will arrange transport of specimens to the laboratory.

The results will be phoned to the referring doctor and RACF RN.

If the result is positive, Public Health Services will be in contact with further advice and a specialised COVID-19 sample collection team will be sent to the RACF to collect specimens from all residents and staff.

While waiting for test results, the resident should be considered a suspect case. Follow appropriate infection prevention and control measures as outlined in the national guidelines.

For testing in other residential care facilities

For testing in residential care facilities other than aged care, please follow site-specific protocols or call Public Health Services to discuss.