

July 7, 2020

**Re: New York City's COVID-19 Test & Trace Corps**

Dear Colleague,

On July 6, 2020, New York City (NYC) began [Phase 3](#) of its re-opening, reflecting the success of shelter in place policies that brought about [significant reductions in new COVID-19 cases](#), hospitalizations, and deaths. As we continue to re-open NYC, face coverings, physical distancing, and hand hygiene precautions will be critical to preventing disease transmission and a resurgence, as will COVID-19 diagnostic testing and contact tracing.

To this end, the City has launched the [Test & Trace Corps](#), an unprecedented effort to identify individuals who have COVID-19 or were recently exposed, and reduce the risk of disease transmission. Fact sheets in multiple languages for patients that explain the Test & Trace Corps program can be found [here](#). You can order Test & Trace Corps informational handouts [here](#).

We ask for your partnership in testing patients, educating them about isolation, informing them of NYC contact tracing activities, and helping to link them to supportive services.

**Step One: Test**

**Offering Testing**

**All New Yorkers should be offered diagnostic testing for COVID-19 and testing should be made a part of routine care in all settings, including outpatient practices and emergency departments.** While testing should be offered to all patients, providers should refer to the New York State Department of Health June 2, 2020 [Revised Interim Guidance: Protocol for COVID-19 Testing Applicable to All Health care Providers and Local Health Departments](#) for information regarding who to prioritize for testing. As noted in [Health Advisory #18](#), repeat testing may be considered in certain populations regardless of known exposures. This may include patients who:

- Report new [COVID-19 symptoms](#)
- Spent at least 10 minutes within six feet of an individual with confirmed COVID-19 in the preceding 14 days
- Participated in demonstrations or other large gatherings within the preceding 14 days
- Plan to visit people who may be at [risk of severe COVID-19](#) if infected
- Work or live in residential congregate settings (e.g., nursing homes, adult care settings, shelters, prisons and jails)
- Work in health care (such as hospitals workers, outpatient offices or clinics, and home health workers)
- Work in other occupations involving prolonged close contact with others (less than 6 feet away for 10 minutes or more), particularly if face coverings were not used, such as construction workers (particularly if working in confined space), taxi and rideshare drivers, and other jobs involving frequent close contact with others.

Testing decisions, including the need for and frequency of repeat testing, should be made using shared decision-making with patients, taking into account population- or occupation-specific guidance.

### **Advising Patients Regarding Isolation**

Patients with symptoms of COVID-19 should be advised to [isolate at home](#) unless they need medical care, including COVID-19 diagnostic testing (polymerase chain reaction (rRT-PCR) or antigen test). Individuals who cannot isolate at home may qualify for temporary housing in a NYC hotel at no charge (see [Step Three: Take Care](#) below). Patients should isolate as follows:

- Symptomatic people should [isolate for at least 10 days](#) after the start of their symptoms and until they have had 72 hours free of fever without antipyretics and an overall reduction in symptoms.
- Asymptomatic people with a positive COVID-19 diagnostic test should stay isolated for at least 10 days from the day the positive test specimens were collected.

Employers may have different isolation requirements before allowing people to return to work, as required by New York State.

Inform your patients with positive diagnostic test results that someone from the Test & Trace Corps will be contacting them (see [Step Two: Trace](#), below). Suggest to your patients that they make a list of all people with whom they had close contact from two days before symptoms started (or, if asymptomatic, from two days before the positive test specimens were collected) to when they began isolation. This will make their tracing interview more efficient.

Close contacts are those people who spent at least 10 minutes within 6 feet of an individual with COVID-19, such as household members, intimate partners, and people providing care in the household. Advise patients who are comfortable doing so to suggest to their close contacts that they be tested for COVID-19 and to expect a call from the Test & Trace Corps.

### **Reporting Test Results**

You should report COVID-19 cases diagnosed using a CLIA-waived, point-of-care (POC) COVID-19 diagnostic test. Report all positive POC diagnostic test results to the NYC Health Department via [Reporting Central](#) or the Provider Access Line (PAL) at (866) 692-3641.

**Technical Note: POC tests have a lower sensitivity for COVID-19 diagnosis than conventional rRT-PCR assays. Negative results should be considered presumptive and confirmed with a viral RNA molecular assay (e.g., rRT-PCR). Advise symptomatic patients with a negative POC test result to isolate until the confirmatory test result is reported to them (and to continue to do so if positive).**

### **Step Two: Trace**

Contact tracers in the Test & Trace Corps interview NYC residents diagnosed with COVID-19 to educate about COVID-19 symptoms and transmission; elicit close contacts; reinforce the importance of isolation; evaluate the need for supportive services (e.g., hoteling, food,

medications); and inform them when they can end isolation. Contact tracers then attempt to speak with identified close contacts to notify them of their possible exposures, without divulging the name of the COVID-19 patient to maintain confidentiality, as required by law. Contact tracers also recommend testing and quarantine; evaluate close contacts' need for supportive services; and inform them when they can end quarantine. Individuals with confirmed COVID-19 and close contacts are monitored daily by telephone or text message until the final day of their isolation or quarantine period to assess their health and need for supportive services. If a quarantined close contact becomes symptomatic during the monitoring period, they will be advised to get tested for COVID-19 and to isolate.

### **Information to Include in Lab Requisitions**

To date, the Trace team has encountered many instances when a patient's phone number has been incorrect or absent. To facilitate contact tracing, it is important to include complete, accurate patient contact information (particularly a phone number and, if possible, a second contact number) when submitting laboratory requisitions for COVID-19 testing.

### **Providing Information to the Trace Team**

When necessary, a Trace team member will call the healthcare provider who ordered the COVID-19 test for contact information on individuals with COVID-19. Because contact tracing is conducted for a public health purpose, the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) permits health care providers to share such information [without patient authorization](#).

### **Helping Patients Prepare for a Call from the Trace Program**

Some people will be concerned about sharing personal information when they are contacted by the Trace program. You can help prepare patients for contact tracing by doing the following:

- Tell patients to expect a call from the Trace program if they test positive for COVID-19. The call from the Trace team may occur before you notify them of their test results. Depending on the phone carrier, the caller identification may refer to "COVID," "NYC Test + Trace," or may begin with "212-540" or "212-240."
- Encourage patients to answer the contact tracer's questions as honestly and accurately as possible.
- Inform patients that the Test & Trace program is required to protect and maintain patient confidentiality and privacy.
- Assure patients that Test & Trace program services are not a public benefit under the public charge test.
- Confirm that services to help with isolation and quarantine are available to New Yorkers regardless of immigration status or language spoken.

If patients are concerned that they were exposed to someone with COVID-19 but have not been contacted by the Trace program, advise them that they can get tested for COVID-19.

### **Step Three: Take Care**

The final component of the Test & Trace Corps strategy is to “take care” of New Yorkers, ensuring they can safely isolate or quarantine. For people who cannot safely isolate or quarantine in their residence and want to help keep other household members from getting sick, a free hotel room, with food and other services, is available for the duration of their isolation or quarantine. A social worker meets with every guest to assess what services are needed during their stay and upon leaving the hotel.

### **Hotel Isolation or Quarantine**

To help a patient arrange isolation or quarantine in a free hotel room, please call [Take Care](#) at **844-NYC-4NYC (844-692-4692)**. You will be asked to provide the following information:

- Patient name
- Patient date of birth
- Patient telephone number
- Health care provider telephone number

A nurse or social worker will contact the patient to arrange a hotel. If the patient has underlying health conditions that will require attention during their isolation or quarantine, please obtain written consent from the patient so that all required confidential health information can be shared with clinical personnel assigned to the hotel.

Patients can also arrange isolation or quarantine for themselves by calling Take Care at the number above.

### **Isolating at Home**

People who wish to isolate or quarantine at home (rather than in a hotel) may require assistance in order to isolate or quarantine safely. Contact tracers screen for basic needs like food and medication delivery when speaking with COVID-19 patients and their close contacts. When they identify needs, contact tracers refer individuals to resource navigators, who contact clients within 24 hours to help coordinate access to resources.

Thank you for your continued support and commitment during the COVID-19 public health emergency. Together, we can stop the spread of COVID-19 in New York City.

Sincerely,



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