OBJECTIVES

- To allow health care professionals to test eligible patients in assessment centres for the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) using a nasopharyngeal or throat swab (e.g., ESwab) without an authorized prescriber’s order when a patient meets the current screening criteria in Section 2.1 below. This action falls under the Medical Officer of Health’s authority under the Public Health Act (Alberta).

- All laboratory orders for COVID-19 swabs collected under this directive will be submitted under the Zone Medical Officer of Health. It is the responsibility of the office of the Zone Medical Officer of Health to review and follow up with COVID-19 swab results.

- Health care professionals shall refer to and follow direction on COVID-19 from the Alberta Health Services (AHS) Emergency Coordination Centre.

PRINCIPLES

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses. Some cause respiratory illness in people, ranging from mild common colds to severe illnesses. Others cause illness in animals. Rarely, animal coronaviruses can infect people, and more rarely, these can then spread from person to person through close contact. Novel coronaviruses are new strains of the virus that have not been previously identified in humans.

APPLICABILITY

Compliance with this document is required by all Alberta Health Services employees, members of the medical and midwifery staffs, Students, Volunteers, and other persons acting on behalf of Alberta Health Services (including contracted service providers as necessary).
ELEMENTS

1. Points of Emphasis
   1.1 A nasopharyngeal swab in Universal Transport Medium or a throat swab in transport medium (e.g., ESwab in ESwab medium) should be submitted for testing. Only one (1) sample is required for both COVID-19 testing and the routine respiratory virus testing.

   1.2 Health care professionals shall practice proper personal protective equipment (PPE) precautions as per the AHS COVID-19 (Novel Coronavirus, 2019-nCoV) Interim Infection and Prevention Control Recommendations.

2. Inclusion Criteria
   2.1 Current screening criteria as outlined by the AHS Emergency Coordination Centre shall be reviewed by health care professionals every shift, at minimum.

3. Exclusion Criteria
   3.1 Patients who are asymptomatic for COVID-19 and do not meet the current screening criteria in Section 2.1 above.

4. Obtaining a Nasopharyngeal or Throat Swab
   4.1 Proper technique for obtaining a nasopharyngeal or throat swab can be found in the AHS Collection of a Nasopharyngeal and Throat Swab for Detection of Respiratory Infection.

5. Documentation
   5.1 The health care professional shall document initiation of this directive, assessments including obtaining the nasopharyngeal or throat swab, interventions, and patient responses on the patient’s health record.

DEFINITIONS

Authorized prescriber means a health care professional who is permitted by federal and provincial legislation, their regulatory college, Alberta Health Services, and practice setting (where applicable) to prescribe medications.

Health care professional means an individual who is a member of a regulated health discipline, as defined by the Health Disciplines Act (Alberta) or the Health Professions Act (Alberta), and who practises within scope and role.

Health record means the collection of all records documenting individually identifying health information in relation to a single person.
Order means a direction given by a regulated health care professional to carry out specific activity(-ies) as part of the diagnostic and/or therapeutic care and treatment to the benefit of a patient. An order may be written (including handwritten and/or electronic), verbal, by telephone, or facsimile.

Patient means an adult or child who receives or has requested health care or services from Alberta Health Services and its health care providers or individuals authorized to act on behalf of Alberta Health Services. This term is inclusive of residents, clients and outpatients.

REFERENCES

- Alberta Health Services Governance Documents:
  - Consent to Treatment/Procedure(s) Policy Suite (#PRR-01)
- Alberta Health Services Resources:
  - AHS Youtube Channel - ProvLab
  - Alberta Precision Laboratories Bulletin (April 15, 2020): Change From Nasopharyngeal to Throat Swab for COVID-19 and RPP Testing
  - Collection of a Nasopharyngeal and Throat Swab for Detection of Respiratory Infection (ProvLab)
  - COVID-19 (Novel Coronavirus, 2019-nCoV) Interim Infection and Prevention Control Recommendations
  - Nasopharyngeal Specimen Collection Practises Video Series
  - Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) webpage
  - Triage Screening Criteria for ED/UCC/EMS/Obstetrical Nurses, Clerks, Midwives, Physicians
- Non-Alberta Health Services Documents:
  - Lippincott Advisor
  - Lippincott Procedures
  - Public Health Act (Alberta)

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