



Residential Care Setting Surveillance Testing Strategy & Guidance

The State of Colorado is committed to mitigating the spread of COVID-19 in residential care settings, including nursing homes, assisted living residences and other residential care settings. A key strategy to achieving this goal is the implementation of facility wide surveillance testing to identify potential asymptomatic residents or staff with SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. Identifying previously unknown individuals allows for the timely implementation of appropriate infection prevention interventions such as isolation and cohorting to prevent the spread of the virus within the facility. Testing should not be conducted in isolation but should be implemented in addition to [recommended Infection Prevention and Control \(IPC\) measures](#).

Testing Strategy

Given current resource shortages, the State has developed a testing strategy to maximize expansion of testing across Colorado residential care settings.

- The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommend that COVID-19 surveillance testing take place in all residential care settings. Currently facilities with the largest resident census are being actively contacted to encourage participation in the state sponsored COVID-19 surveillance testing.
- The State seeks the support of residential care settings in expanding current capacity by requesting that facilities utilize their own staff to collect samples from residents and/or staff. Sample collection can be conducted by clinical or lay staff members (*see Step 7 under Testing below for more information*).
- Residential Care Setting Testing Guidance (*see [Expanding Testing & Cohorting Public Health Strategy](#) for additional information*)
 - For residential care settings with no known cases of COVID-19, the State recommends baseline testing of all residents and staff within the facility. After this point, on-going weekly testing of staff and residents who have left the building within the last two weeks is suggested.
 - It is highly recommended that residential care settings collaborate with their Medical Director, if applicable, as they pursue initiating surveillance testing.
 - It is also recommended that essential providers entering the building be engaged to ensure they are participating in weekly testing. It is at the discretion of the facility and the provider to determine how that testing takes place. These providers are eligible to participate in testing at the facility.
 - For residential care settings with identified cases of COVID-19, the State recommends initial testing of all residents and staff within the facility to inform isolation and cohorting. Following the initial testing of all staff and residents, the State recommends on-going weekly testing of all previously negative residents and staff to detect ongoing transmission until no new cases are identified over 14 days from the most recent positive case. Facilities should work with their Medical Director, if applicable, as well as essential providers coming into their building to ensure that they are also participating in weekly on-going testing.

- Residential care settings that are either not working with Colorado State University (*see below under "who is involved in the State's surveillance testing strategy?"*) or have not yet received direct outreach from the State are still able to receive State support if they are ready to begin testing. Requests for supplies or on-the-ground testing support can be made [HERE](#).

Surveillance Testing Activities

To expand testing rapidly across residential care settings and to provide the level of assistance that each facility needs, there are multiple agencies and institutions, as well as processes, being stood up simultaneously. Further detail about the importance of testing, information about who is involved, the testing process, and how a facility can seek support is provided below.

Why is the State focused on implementing facility-wide surveillance testing in residential care settings?

1. Residential care settings are critical health care providers to some of Colorado's most at risk populations. The role of these settings is to provide necessary care and support, while protecting the lives of residents. Testing allows facilities to identify asymptomatic pre-symptomatic, and symptomatic staff and residents so that staff with infection can be removed from the workplace and appropriate infection prevention recommendations can be implemented for residents to prevent spread of infection to others. Testing is a vital component of efforts to prevent and respond to COVID-19 in residential settings in order to prevent illness and death in vulnerable populations.
2. Viral testing in residential care settings is an important addition to other IPC recommendations aimed at preventing COVID-19 from entering these settings, detecting cases quickly, and stopping transmission. This guideline is based on currently available information about COVID-19 and will be refined and updated as more information becomes available.

I have concerns about testing...

- **I don't have the staff to administer the tests:** Although we realize that staffing shortages are being experienced across residential care settings, the administration of COVID-19 tests is critical in all residential care settings. For this reason, the State has additional resources and support available for those who are unable to administer the tests with their own staff (*see Who is involved in the State's surveillance testing strategy?*).
- **I've heard the tests are uncomfortable:** Most testing will be done with Nasal Mid-Turbinate Swabs that are much quicker and more comfortable than the nasopharyngeal (NP) swabs. Even for those using the NP swabs, the few minutes of discomfort should be more than offset by the fact that you may be saving real lives (perhaps even someone close to you).
- **I'm worried that I'll experience staffing shortages due to staff testing positive:** Though staffing shortages are a real concern, planning ahead can make a big difference in managing shortages should they arise (*see Step 4 under Pre-Testing Preparation below*). Additionally, the state is actively working to identify resources and supports for residential care settings in the event of critical staffing shortages. Facilities

will be notified when these resources become available. For the safety of the residents, it is important to identify infected staff and take precautions to prevent spread of infection.

- **I don't want our facility listed on CDPHE's outbreak list, which is public:**
Having COVID-19 positive cases within your building is very likely not an indicator of the infection prevention efforts or quality of the care provided within the facility. The State would much prefer that COVID-19 positive cases be identified early to prevent further spread than to delay identification to avoid being labeled as a facility with an outbreak. As testing expands, the State anticipates an increase in residential care settings and will not in any way link this increase with poor compliance by the facility.
- **We don't want to be part of a research study:**
Though CSU initially was conducting a research study during their phase one work with residential care facilities, in their capacity of assisting with surveillance testing through a contract with the State, all testing is diagnostic. CSU is utilizing a CLIA Certified Lab to analyze the tests and will be providing diagnostic results directly to the facility and individuals who have been tested. CSU may request permission from individuals to maintain samples for future research. Samples will not be used for research without your permission. All individuals, no matter if they participate in the research or not, are eligible to access testing.

Who is involved in the State's surveillance testing strategy?

- To expand the state's capacity, we have contracted with **Colorado State University's Laboratory** to assist in the collection and analysis of COVID-19 tests from residential care settings. A subset of long-term care facilities are working directly with CSU, who will mail supplies to the facility. The facility will collect the swabs themselves and then courier them back to CSU's lab. The results will then be provided to the facility and the local public health agency (in the event that a positive test is identified).
- **The State Laboratory** is responsible for processes the vast majority of COVID-19 tests being conducted in the state. The State Lab can provide a facility with test kits and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) so the facility staff can collect swabs from residents and/or staff. The samples will then be couriered back to the lab for processing and results will be provided to the facility.
- As the state reaches out to residential care settings, we are also making every effort to keep **Local Public Health Agencies (LPHA)** informed. LPHAs are responsible for assisting with outbreak response, thus keeping them informed about testing within facilities helps with resource planning. LPHAs may contact facilities directly to gauge interest or need for testing and facilitate contact with the State Lab. LPHAs are also able to make requests to the State Lab for supplies on behalf of facilities.
- In the event of an outbreak, or if a facility has a particular need for additional support, **The Colorado National Guard (CONG)** is available to provide on-the-ground testing assistance to residential care settings. As their capacity is limited, the CONG is reserved for those facilities with an active outbreak or for those that do not have the capacity to collect samples with their own facility staff. Assistance from the CONG must be requested and is subject to their availability.

What kind of testing support is available?

- **Testing Supplies and Laboratory Processing:** Colorado State University and the State Lab are able to provide test kits and PPE to facilities that are interested in conducting testing of their residents and staff. CSU or State staff do not come in-person to the facility, but instead, supplies are mailed directly to the facility. The facility then collects patient samples, which are couriered back to the laboratory for processing.
- **On-the-Ground Testing Support:** The Colorado National Guard is available on a limited basis to provide assistance on-site at the residential care settings. The CONG will work with the facility to schedule their visit, which will include a pre-visit to determine set-up and other logistics. On the day of the CONG's testing, the facility will have all staff and, if desired, residents ready for testing at a specific time. Contracted individuals or essential visitors coming into the building are also eligible to participate in on-the-ground testing at the facility. This will likely mean asking additional staff to be present on-site outside of their typical shift to be tested. The swabs will then be sent to the State Lab for processing.

I want to begin testing. Where do I start?

Pre-Testing Preparation

Step 1. If you are a nursing facility, consult with your Medical Director about your desire to begin testing. Review the [State COVID-19 Guidance for Infection Prevention Checklist](#). Implement the recommendations and address any gaps.

Step 2. Review [Guidance for Submitting Testing Ordered by .CSV file to the CDPHE Lab](#) and develop a process for submitting the required patient data for viral testing.

Step 3. Review [CDPHE INTERIM Expanded Testing & Cohorting Public Health Strategy to Prevent SARS-CoV-2 Transmission in Nursing Homes, Skilled-Nursing Facilities, and Assisted Living Residences](#). Complete the [Checklist for Isolation and Cohorting of Residents](#). Contact your local public health agency to work together to prepare a plan for safely isolating and cohorting residents identified during testing.

[Identify your local public health agency here: [find my local public health agency](#)]

Step 4. Review [CDPHE Preparing for and Responding to Single Cases and Outbreaks of COVID-19 in Long-Term Care Settings](#) and develop a plan to exclude positive staff from work. Consider policies or strategies to mitigate possible staffing shortages.

Step 5. Review [CDC Guidance for Discontinuation of Transmission-Based Precautions](#) and [CDC Criteria for Return to Work for HCP with Confirmed or Suspected COVID-19](#) and develop a plan for discontinuation of resident isolation and the return of staff to work.

Testing

Step 6. After you have successfully worked through steps 1-5 of the pre-testing preparation, you are ready to begin testing. Complete the [Testing Resource Request Form](#) to indicate your resource and support needs.

Step 7. Plan to follow guidelines for safe testing and specimen collection: [Transmission Based Precautions for COVID-19 Test-Based Prevention Strategies in Residential Settings](#) and [Guidance Regarding Specimen Collection and Information about Donning Appropriate PPE while Collecting Patient Samples](#).

Step 8. Ensure samples are packaged appropriately using: [Guidance for packing specimen](#) and [request a state courier](#) to pick up specimen and bring them to the lab for testing.

What should I do if I identify a case of COVID-19 in the facility?

- To report a suspected or confirmed outbreak of COVID-19, complete [this form](#) and send it via secure email to your local public health agency, or to the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE_HAIOutbreak@state.co.us)
- Take immediate action to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Implement your plan developed during *Steps 3 and 4* of the *Testing Pre-Preparation*. You should also review [CDPHE's Long-Term Care Cohorting Recommendations](#) and implement isolation and cohorting of residents and staff to prevent further spread. Work directly with your local public health agency to implement your plan.

Additional Information and Resources

[Guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) on Performing COVID-19 Testing in Nursing Homes](#)

[Guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) on Preparing for COVID-19 in Nursing Homes](#)

[Guidance for Infection Control and Prevention of COVID-19 in Nursing Homes from CMS](#)

[Interim Guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) on Preventing the Spread of COVID-19 in Retirement Communities and Independent Living Facilities \(Interim Guidance\)](#)

[Guidelines for Prevention & Control of COVID-19 in Assisted Living Residences](#)

[Transmission based precautions for COVID-19 test-based prevention strategies in residential settings](#)