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Guide to Standing Up a Municipal Testing Program

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Key terms:

- **PCR Test** – This is the gold-standard test for detecting a current COVID-19 infection. Also called a molecular test, this test detects genetic material of the virus using a lab technique called polymerase chain reaction (PCR).
- **Antigen Test** – These tests are less sensitive than PCR tests, and depending on the situation, a PCR test may be needed to confirm an antigen test result. This test detects certain proteins in the virus and can produce results in minutes.
- **Nasopharyngeal (NP)** specimen collection – A fluid sample collected by inserting a long swab into the nostril and taking fluid from the back of the nose. Patients report significant discomfort associated with this specimen collection method.
- **Anterior nares (AN)** specimen collection (*recommended*) – A fluid sample collected by inserting a short swab into the nostril and taking fluid from the front of the nose.
- **Self-swab** – An anterior nares (AN) sample collected by the test-taker themselves, by inserting a short swab into their own nostril and taking fluid from the front of the nose.
- **Saliva Testing** – A fluid sample that is collected by spitting into a tube.
- **Provider order/standing order** – State law, M.G.L. c. 111D, section 8 (7), requires a licensed provider to issue an order for a COVID-19 lab test. A standing order is an order issued by a licensed provider, which is not specific to one person. Any individual who meets the criteria included in a standing order may receive the test consistent with the terms of the order.

There are three ways to bring testing into your community:

- Hire a **mobile testing provider** to handle end-to-end testing (order, specimen collection, resulting) in a walk-up or drive-up location of your choosing.

- Order and pay for test kits that your residents can **self-administer** at home. You can authorize a vendor to mail test kits to your residents, or you can hand out test kits at a central location for residents to take home and mail-in or self-administer and return on-site (saliva and self-swab options).
- Organize testing yourself leveraging municipal employees and **enter into an agreement with a lab** to process the tests.

Where can I find a mobile testing provider?

- Mobile testing providers that have operated a testing programs in the Commonwealth include:
 - **Transformative Healthcare** (Contact: Kevin Mont, kmont@fallonambulance.com)
 - **Cataldo Ambulance** (Contact: Dan Hoffenberg, dhoffenberg@CataldoAmbulance.com)
 - **American Medical Response** (Contact: Patrick Leonardo, pleonardo@gmr.net)
 - **Project Beacon** (Contact: info@beacontesting.com)
 - **CIC Health** ([Visit their website](#) for more information)
 - **Pro EMS** (Contact: Bill Mergendahl, wmerg@ProEMS.com)
 - **Concentric by Ginkgo** ([Visit their website](#) for more information)
- Partner with your local [Community Health Center](#)
- Prices vary by provider, depending on scale and the exact needs of your community.

Where can I order self-administered kits for my residents?

- **The Commonwealth has entered into agreements with several companies that offer self-administered at home test kits.**
 - Municipalities may use the terms of the Commonwealth’s contract to purchase test kits or can enter into their own agreement.
 - For additional information about how to purchase products utilizing the terms of the Commonwealths contract refer to the [User Guide for COVID-19 At-Home Testing Program](#).
 - This document will be updated if new companies are added to the state contract, and posted on [COMMBUYS](#) under the description “Due Diligence Notice for At-home COVID-19 Testing.”
- **The Commonwealth has a contract with the following companies.** Terms of the contract and prices are detailed in the [User Guide](#).
 - **Everlywell** – unsupervised “at home” anterior nasal swab
 - **ixLayer** – unsupervised “at home” saliva collection
 - **Project Beacon** – supervised or unsupervised self-administered anterior nasal tests
- **Other vendors** who provide this service but are not currently under contract with the Commonwealth
 - [Concentric by Ginkgo](#) – saliva collection, including pooled testing options
 - [Vault Health](#) – saliva collection
 - [Color Genomics, Inc](#) – unsupervised “at home” anterior nasal swab

What are the steps I need to take to operate my own site?

- Obtain a **standing order** for your site from a medical professional, such as the physician associated with your board of health (note that “at home” testing options may be able to provide physician orders”).
- **Identify a safe location** for collecting specimens, either walk-up or drive-through.
 - Walk up sites should be large enough to ensure individuals keep at least 6 feet of distance between one another.
- **Identify staff to collect specimens.**
 - Department of Public Health [guidance](#) requires all personnel performing either nasopharyngeal (NP) or anterior nares (AN) specimen collection to be trained and demonstrate competency to be able to safely collect specimens.
 - While specific licensure is not required, all unlicensed healthcare personnel should be appropriately supervised.
- Ensure you have an **adequate supply of PPE** to support your testing operation.
 - For staff collecting specimens or within 6 feet of individuals suspected to have COVID-19, the following PPE is required:
 - N95 mask or higher-level respirator (a surgical mask can be used only if an N95 is not available)
 - Eye protection
 - Gloves
 - Gown, when collecting specimens
 - Staff administering tests must change gloves between handling of specimens suspected of COVID-19.
 - Refer to [DPH Comprehensive PPE Guidance](#) or contact your local board of health for further information regarding the proper use of PPE.
- **Identify staff to call individuals who test positive.**
 - Options include the health care provider that signed the standing order, the local health department, or staff who have been properly trained to deliver results.
- **Contract with a lab to process the specimens** collected by your staff; most labs provide swabs and transport media.
 - If your lab partner or existing supplier is not able to provide you with sufficient test kits to maximize daily capacity, you can request kits (swabs and transport media) from the Department of Public Health by filling out this form: [Resource Request Form for Testing Supplies](#) and submitting it via email to your Regional HMCC. Regional HMCC contact info can be found on [Learn about HMCC](#).
 - Please consult with your lab before requesting kits to ensure you request the proper supplies.
 - Prior to entering into a contract with a lab you should make sure you understand their average turnaround time and understand the logistics of couriering samples to the lab and receiving results.

Frequently Asked Questions

How can I decrease the costs associated with a mobile testing provider?

- Identify a physician at your Local Board of Health who can provide a **standing order** for COVID-19 tests for your residents.
- **Identify medical staff**, such as medical assistants, EMTs, or others who can support operations of your site.
- Use **Local Board of Health staff to do resulting for the positive cases** identified through the testing program.

Who can issue a standing order for my site?

- State law, M.G.L. c. 111D, section 8 (7), **requires a licensed provider to issue an order for a COVID-19 lab test.**
 - Authorized ordering providers include, a: physician, chiropractor, surgeon, podiatrist, osteopath, nurse practitioner, dentist, or physician’s assistant. See MGL Ch. 111D; [105 CMR 180.280](#).

If I have a medical professional that will sign the standing order, is there a template that the provider can use?

- Yes, a model standing order can be found [here](#).

Can anyone collect a specimen?

- Department of Public Health [guidance](#) requires all personnel performing either nasopharyngeal (NP) or anterior nares (AN) specimen collection to be **trained and demonstrate competency to be able to safely collect specimens**. While specific licensure is not required, all unlicensed healthcare personnel should be appropriately supervised.

What Personal Protective Equipment should be used for specimen collection?

- **For staff collecting specimens or within 6 feet of individuals suspected to have COVID-19, the following PPE is required:**
 - N95 mask or higher-level respirator (a surgical mask can be used only if an N95 is not available)
 - Eye protection
 - Gloves
 - Gown, when collecting specimens
- Staff administering tests **must change gloves between handling of specimens** suspected of COVID-19.
 - Refer to [DPH Comprehensive PPE Guidance](#) or contact your local board of health for further information regarding the proper use of PPE.

What should I know before hiring a testing site operator?

- Ensure your site operator will **use appropriate PPE**, as noted above.
- Ensure that your site operator will **follow CDC Interim Guidelines for Collecting, Handling, and Testing Clinical Specimens from Persons for Coronavirus**, available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/lab/guidelines-clinical-specimens.html>.
- Ensure your site operator will **provide appropriate educational information**, including:
 - Written information on how and when the individual will receive test results, and how to ask questions;
 - Written information on **next steps** to take following testing, including information on how to obtain follow-up medical care;
 - To **address questions about diagnosis** if individuals test positive for COVID-19.

What are some other considerations in setting up a testing program for my community?

- **Think about what population you want to test:**
 - Do you want to offer testing to all residents, including children, or to a certain segment (*i.e., a sports team and their families, restaurant/retail workers, a religious community, etc.*)?
 - Consider promoting targeted ads and messages to this population in advance of the testing event(s).
 - Consider early morning, evening, and weekend testing hours.
- **Think about where you want the testing to take place:**
 - Consider locating testing near public transportation so that it is accessible for all residents.
 - Consider locating testing near vulnerable populations who may have more difficulty accessing testing on their own (*i.e. Near homeless shelters, senior housing facilities, or non-English speaking communities*).
 - If using mobile testing, work with your testing provider to determine an appropriate location that is accessible to the community, but also meets the provider's logistical needs (*i.e., access to electricity/generators, bathrooms or portable toilets, etc.*).