



health

Department:  
Health  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

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## **NOTICE: UPDATED PRIORITISED COVID-19 TESTING GUIDANCE**

This guidance provides an updated prioritised testing approach to enable South Africa to utilise its Covid-19 testing resources to support South Africa's Covid-19 response priorities. The previous targeted testing strategy was developed to accommodate the country's constrained testing capacity, in both the public and private sectors, to deal with the testing backlog and prioritise those categories of patients with an urgent clinical need.

The current National Health Laboratory Service (NHLS) daily testing capability, combined with the private sector laboratories, will ensure that the total capacity for testing in South Africa is approximately 40 000 to 50 000 tests per day.

Current laboratory capacity and the positivity rates support a review of the current targeted testing strategy as the number of persons being tested has dramatically dropped, even with people from all previous priority levels (high, medium and low) being eligible for testing. The high positivity rates signal the need for more testing to be done in order to find more cases, and contain the pandemic.

The following categories of people should be tested in both the public and private health sectors:

1. **Hospitalised patients**
  - a. **Symptomatic<sup>1</sup> patients must be prioritised, and test results should be received within 24 hours**
  - b. All other patients should be tested on admission.
2. **Any person with symptoms where Covid-19 infection is considered to be a possible cause.**
  - a. Persons at high risk for infection or poor outcomes, e.g. health care workers, those aged > 60 years, those with comorbidities, pregnant women, should be prioritised.
  - b. Other symptomatic<sup>1</sup> persons presenting to health facilities, as well as those identified as being symptomatic during health facility, workplace, school or other screening, should be tested.

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<sup>1</sup> "Symptomatic" for the purposes of this list means a person with symptoms suggestive of Covid-19 following the current definition of a person under investigation (PUI) for Covid-19.

3. **Individuals who are close contacts of confirmed cases, including asymptomatic<sup>2</sup> contacts.** Whilst a close contact is generally defined as contact within one metre of a Covid-19 confirmed case for >15 minutes without PPE (no face cover/eye cover), alternative definitions should be used in some high-risk settings (e.g. clusters/outbreaks). Please refer to the latest "National Guidelines on Contact Tracing for Covid-19" and "Guidelines for symptom monitoring and management of essential workers for COVID-19 related infection" for further details.
4. Post-mortem testing should be conducted in line with current guidance.

The following individuals or groups should not be tested (unless they fall into one of the priority groups):

1. Asymptomatic people including employees/learners for purposes of returning to work/school
2. Selected groups e.g. sports persons
3. Patients meeting de-isolation criteria as per National Department of Health clinical guidelines should not be re-tested

All specimens from hospitalised patients and health care workers should be clearly labelled as URGENT, whilst post-mortem specimens must be clearly labelled as such.

Implementation of the updated testing strategy will require extensive communication, as well as close liaison between health workers/clinicians and laboratories to ensure that the volume of tests does not negatively impact on turn-around times (TAT). All urgent tests should have a maximum TAT of 24 hours, whilst TAT for other specimens should not exceed 48 hours.

Testing capacity will be continually monitored, and guidance will be updated as the pandemic evolves and additional testing options become available. Rapid antigen tests are expected to become available soon, and guidance regarding use of these tests will be issued.

Kind regards



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**DIRECTOR-GENERAL: HEALTH**

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<sup>2</sup> "Asymptomatic" for the purposes of this list means a person without symptoms suggested by the current PUI definition- although this person may have other symptoms