

Date: May 14, 2020

From: Assistant Under Secretary for Health for Operations (10N)

Subj: COVID-19 Updated Guidance on Testing for Veterans and Employees

To: Network Directors (10N1-23)

1. The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) *Moving Forward Plan* includes screening and testing for COVID-19 to ensure safe care. VHA routinely screens all individuals requesting entrance into a VHA facility and during virtual visits. To date, VHA has tested over 91,000 Veterans and 36,000, or 10% of, employees. Testing for COVID-19 continues to expand and by next week, VHA capacity for testing will approach 60,000 tests per week.
2. The increase in capacity of diagnostic viral testing means that VHA can provide testing to Veterans and employees who are asymptomatic and request testing. Testing under this scenario should not be performed by a rapid test method, reserving those supplies for Veterans and staff who have symptoms of COVID-19 (screen positive), Veterans admitted to the hospital and/or Veterans who are scheduled for surgery or certain high-risk procedures. Veterans and staff should be informed that test results may take several days. Facilities should be prepared to offer COVID-19 diagnostic viral (but not serologic) testing by May 18, 2020.
3. VHA will soon begin evaluating COVID-19 serology testing (also known as antibody testing) to assess if an individual has been previously infected with SARS-CoV-2. It will take several weeks to validate and ramp up serology testing to levels that may serve large numbers of Veterans and employees. Facility participation with national validation efforts is encouraged.
4. Asymptomatic employees can request COVID-19 testing through Occupational Health (OH), the OH designee, or through their VHA primary care provider. Frequency of allowed testing should be determined locally based on volume of requests and test availability, and triage based on symptoms and/or exposure should be established. Most individuals with COVID-19 develop symptoms and likelihood of false negatives is higher in the presymptomatic period. If an employee is found to have suspected or confirmed COVID-19, VHA and CDC criteria for exclusion and return to work recommendations, return to work practices, and work restriction recommendations are found here: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/return-to-work.html>
5. Should you have questions regarding this memorandum, please contact the COVID-19 clinical cell by sending an email to [VHA COVID-19 Resource Room](#)



for  
Renee Oshinski