COVID-19 in Virginia

March 13, 2020

Dear Colleague:

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic, the first pandemic caused by coronavirus. On March 12th, Governor Ralph Northam declared a state of emergency in Virginia. As of this morning, thirty (30) COVID-19 cases have been identified in Virginia. The number of cases in Virginia is updated daily on the VDH COVID-19 webpage. Please note the following information regarding this rapidly changing situation:

Testing for COVID-19

- Due to a limited number of tests available, testing performed at DCLS, Virginia's state lab, is reserved for patients who meet VDH's priority investigation criteria. If you have a patient who meets VDH criteria, please contact your local health department to request approval for testing.

- For other patients who need COVID-19 testing, please contact a private laboratory to ask about how to submit specimens for testing. VDH approval is not needed for testing at private labs.

- Virginia's local health departments do not provide primary care and thus are not equipped to clinically evaluate patients with respiratory symptoms. At this time, local health departments are not providing COVID-19 testing. Please do not refer your patients to a local health department for testing.

Infection Control and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

- CDC published updated interim infection prevention and control recommendations for healthcare settings.

- During collection of nasopharyngeal and oropharyngeal swab specimens for COVID-19 testing, use of an N95 respirator is preferred. If N95 respirators are not available because of PPE shortages, a facemask is acceptable. In addition, eye protection, gloves and a gown should be used.

- The CDC has developed an easy-to-use checklist of strategies to optimize the supply of N95 respirators. In addition, VDH is recommending the steps outlined here.

- CDC posted environmental cleaning and disinfection guidance for healthcare settings. Refer to List N on the EPA website for EPA-registered disinfectants that have qualified for use against SARS-CoV-2, the coronavirus that causes COVID-19.

Infection Control and PPE (continued)

- CMS released revised guidance for infection control and prevention of COVID-19 in **nursing homes** on March 9, 2020. Facilities should *discourage* visitation, and actively screen and *restrict* visitors who meet specified criteria, including persons with fever or other symptoms of COVID-19, or persons unable to demonstrate proper use of infection control techniques. The CDC posted updated guidance for patients with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 in nursing homes.

Assessment of Healthcare Personnel Caring for COVID-19 Patients

If a patient who tests positive for COVID-19 received care in your healthcare setting, please work with your local health department and use this Healthcare Personnel Risk Assessment Tool to assess healthcare personnel who may have been exposed to the patient.

Treatment

Although there are no antiviral drugs licensed by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to treat patients with COVID-19, there are therapeutics under investigation that might be available through clinical trial or compassionate use. For more information, see VDH Information on Investigational Therapeutics.

Thank you for your work responding to COVID-19. Please continue to visit CDC's COVID-19 website and VDH's COVID-19 website for the most current information or contact your local health department if you have questions.

Sincerely,

M. Norman Oliver, MD, MA
State Health Commissioner