

Advice on COVID-19 testing in aged residential care in Auckland

Background

Residents of Aged Residential Care (ARC) are more vulnerable to severe disease if they are infected with COVID-19. This document provides guidance about COVID-19 testing for residents. It does not consider management of residents who have a positive test.

Please note that this is interim guidance and will change as the situation evolves.

Criteria for testing

The clinical component of the COVID-19 case definition is:

Any acute respiratory infection with at least one of the following symptoms: cough, sore throat, shortness of breath, coryza¹, anosmia², dysgeusia³ with or without fever

Note that not all older people will have typical symptoms. Older people may present with worsened mobility, falls, increased confusion or change in cognitive function, worsening chronic conditions of the lungs, or loss of appetite. Nausea, diarrhoea, headache, and myalgia may also occur. Clinicians should have a low threshold for requesting a COVID-19 test on older people with non-specific symptoms.

Symptomatic aged residential care staff members or workers should be tested.

Testing options

Residents should be tested in the ARC facility. They should not be taken into the community for testing. Symptomatic aged residential care staff should be tested in the community. They should contact their GP or visit a Community Testing Centre.

Currently testing of residents should be undertaken through existing primary care relationships

All ARC providers are responsible for testing any residents at the facility who require it. This will additionally ensure eNotification and results management is enabled via the ordering General Practitioner (GP) or Nurse Practitioner (NP).

If you are unable to access testing for symptomatic residents through this option, please contact your DHB programme manager as soon as possible.

¹ Coryza – head cold e.g. runny nose, sneezing, post-nasal drip

² Anosmia – loss of sense of smell

³ Dysgeusia – altered sense of taste

Guidance Statement

Who can order a test?

The form for the laboratory test must be authorised by a general practitioner or nurse practitioner (or other ordering clinician). If the form cannot be signed by the general practitioner or nurse practitioner then an email authorising the test should be attached.

Taking the test

The person assessing the patient must use appropriate PPE, and the patient should wear a mask when the swab is not being taken. If they need hospitalisation testing will be undertaken in hospital.

The specimen (nasopharyngeal swab) should be collected onsite where possible by the ARC general practitioner, nurse practitioner or the registered nurse if appropriately trained. They should be familiar with the information in Appendix 1 which describes how to take the swab.

The correct PPE must be worn by the person taking the test and any staff assisting them. Guidance on the use of PPE for taking a nasopharyngeal swab for COVID-19 can be found [here](#).⁴ Guidance on donning (putting on) and doffing (taking off) PPE can be found [here](#).⁵

A nasopharyngeal swab (use swabs with flexible shafts) placed into a viral transport media (VTM) will obtain the optimal specimen and is the preferred collection method for both symptomatic and asymptomatic testing due to its higher sensitivity in detecting the virus. For more information and for instructions on COVID-19 specimen collection please see the Ministry of Health's advice [here](#).⁶

Please write the code 'SURV-ARC' on the lab form.

Clean the room after taking the test. A general clean of the room should be undertaken. If not already wearing, don PPE. Remove any linen that has been used into linen bags for hot washing. Wipe down surfaces with detergent and water, then hospital grade disinfectant. Remove and discard PPE as clinical waste. Perform hand hygiene. If the test is positive, additional cleaning will be required.

⁴ <https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/pages/hp7716-ppe-for-taking-covid-19-naso-oropharyngeal-swabs-12aug2021.pdf>

⁵ <http://www.arphs.health.nz/assets/Uploads/Resources/Disease-and-illness/Coronavirus/POSTER-A3-PPE-Put-on-Remove-Matt-Rogers.pdf>

⁶ https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/pages/covid-19_specimen_collection_instructions_reviewed_12-5-21.pdf

Notification

Auckland Regional Public Health Service should be notified using the appropriate mechanism. This can be done by:

- E-notification using a Practice Management System if it is available – facility or facility’s GP
- Using MyHealthLink web-portal e-notification (Care Connect) – you will need to have already obtained access to this system (Information on obtaining access to MyHealthLink has previously been sent to ARC facilities, if you have questions please contact your programme manager).
- Fax notifications should not be used

Swabs

A flocked swab should be used and sent in Viral Transport Media (VTM).

Swabs can be ordered by ARC facilities through Labtests, or may be available through your GP or nurse practitioner. To order swabs through Labtests, go to: <https://www.labtests.co.nz/for-referrers/consumable-ordering/>

- All orders need to be made through the online ordering form – see bullet point one on the website. You will need to include the ‘Practice Account ID’ (format = Nxxxxxx).
- If you are unsure whether you have an account, you can call the number on the form or use the online inquiry form (see ‘Contact us’ – bullet point three) noting the name of the facility, physical address, contact name and contact email and contact phone
- If the order is urgent, please add URGENT to the name field on the order form.

Please let your programme manager know if you are placing an urgent order.

Specimen collection

Swabs should be collected by Labtests Monday-Friday 07:00-18:00. This may be by your usual Labtests nurse, or if not scheduled that day by phoning their courier service (phone 09 574 7399 Option 2). Labtests also have limited weekend collection runs.

Over the weekend (if Labtests is unavailable) collection can be arranged by contacting NRHCC Testing on 021 626 594.

Note that swabs can be retained overnight at room temperature (although where possible should be refrigerated), but must be picked up the following day.

Managing the patient

Appropriate infection prevention and control (IPC) measures are required for symptomatic residents who are being tested. They should be managed in a separate room, with an ensuite where possible. Staff should use appropriate PPE when providing care. If the resident requires non-invasive ventilation, nebuliser or another potentially aerosol generating procedure⁷, please discuss this with your GP or NP as additional precautions will be required.

Please refer to the document *Northern Region Guidance for the Prevention, Identification and Control of Outbreaks*. This is available on the Auckland Regional Public Health Service [website](#).

Vigilant and frequent hand washing is needed for the resident of concern, the staff and other residents.

Results

It is important that the GP or NP ordering the test actively monitors for the return of the result so that both positive and negative results can be acted on as quickly as possible.

Results of tests will go to the person ordering the test. A copy can go to any person nominated on the test form if they have a HealthLink inbox.

If you have access to TestSafe they will be also available on that site.

⁷ A list of aerosol generating procedures can be found here: <https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-information-specific-audiences/covid-19-personal-protective-equipment-workers/frequently-asked-questions-about-ppe-and-covid-19#aerosol>