

06 March 2020

## Requirement to notify suspect cases of COVID-19 to public health before testing

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Novel coronavirus infection (COVID-19) is a notifiable disease and cases must be notified on suspicion to Community and Public Health. We ask that you do this by telephone whether in business hours or out of hours.

Between 08.30am and 5.00pm please call 03 364 1777 and Press 1  
After hours please call Christchurch Hospital on 03 364 0640 and ask the operator to page the on-call Health Protection Officer.

When considering whether or not your patient meets the suspect case definition for COVID-19 infection, we strongly encourage you to use the triage tool available on the Ministry of Health's website at the link below:

<https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/pages/covid-19-triage-form-28feb20-v2.pdf>

This tool links to the current version of the case definition and the current countries/regions of concern.

You will not be able to request laboratory testing for SARS-CoV-2 (the name of the virus which causes COVID-19 infection) until you have discussed your patient with public health staff *and* confirmed with them that your patient meets the suspect case definition. When this has been done, please indicate on the laboratory request form that the case has been discussed with public health. If you do not do this, the specimen will not be processed.

Please note that this is a change from previous advice that was sent to general practices in Canterbury by CPRG on 28<sup>th</sup> February which asked GPs to call the on-call Microbiologist or Infectious Diseases Physician to discuss testing for COVID-19. If your patient is unwell enough for you to consider referral for hospital treatment, you should still speak to a hospital clinician about this in the first instance.

Two updated information sheets from Canterbury Health Laboratories are attached to this message. These cover

1. PPE requirements for taking a specimen for testing
2. Which specimens to take and what swabs should be used

If your patient meets the suspect case definition and will be tested, please ensure that before sending them home you advise them to self-isolate until their test result is available.

The situation with COVID-19 is evolving rapidly, and the most up to date information about the disease in New Zealand can be found on the Ministry of Health's website

<https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus>

The Ministry's resources specifically for health professionals are available from the above webpage.

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