



Rhode Island Department of Health
Three Capitol Hill
Providence, RI 02908-5097
www.health.ri.gov

Memo

To: Rhode Island Nursing Facilities and Assisted Living Residences

From: Louis Marchetti, Ph.D., TC (NRCC), Acting Assistant Director of Health, COVID-19 Testing Program Lead

Date: March 14, 2022

Subject: COVID-19 Testing Guidance

Dear Colleagues,

Due to the availability of effective COVID-19 vaccines, therapeutics, and decreased rates of transmission and hospitalizations, the Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH) is entering an endemic, or predictable and manageable, stage of the COVID-19 response. The changes for nursing facilities and assisted living residences outlined below are part of RIDOH's plan to adapt its COVID-19 response.

Surveillance testing

The State has provided swabbing and courier services throughout the pandemic to assist with routine surveillance testing in nursing facilities and assisted living residences for asymptomatic personnel and residents. In alignment with the [latest recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), RIDOH no longer recommends routine surveillance testing in nursing facilities and assisted living residences when Rhode Island is not in a period of high transmission.

Since Rhode Island is currently in a period of substantial transmission, facilities may choose to discontinue surveillance testing for asymptomatic residents and asymptomatic personnel who are up to date on their COVID-19 vaccinations effective immediately. You can monitor the State's transmission levels on [RIDOH's COVID-19 data tracker](#).

The State will not schedule any swabbing or courier services for surveillance testing after March 21, 2022. Please inform your assigned case manager at RIDOH if your facility would like to discontinue surveillance testing before March 21.

Testing recommendations and requirements

Personnel and residents should still be tested if they have symptoms of COVID-19, recently came in contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19, or if the facility experiences an outbreak.

Facilities should also continue to test any residents returning from a hospital or newly admitted residents upon arrival.

Personnel should also be tested to meet [federal regulatory requirements from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services \(CMS\)](#).

CMS requires that facilities test personnel who aren't up to date on their COVID-19 vaccinations:

- Twice per week during periods of high and substantial transmission.
- Once per week during periods of moderate transmission.

During periods of low transmission, there is no testing requirement for unvaccinated personnel. If the level of community transmission decreases to a lower level, the facility should continue testing staff at the higher frequency until community transmission has remained at the lower level for at least two weeks.

RIDOH still requires that any visitors of nursing facilities or assisted living residences show proof of vaccination or a negative test result upon entry. For more information on those requirements, visit [this web page](#).

Resources for COVID-19 testing

By the end of April 2022, facilities must be able to meet any testing requirements by arranging their own specimen collection and transportation services. Either point-of-care or laboratory-based testing will satisfy each of the above testing requirements.

Any facility can procure point-of-care test kits themselves through medical supply vendors. In most instances, these tests can be reimbursed through insurance. Facilities that receive point-of-care tests from the federal government may use those tests to meet any testing requirements, as well. Results from any point-of-care testing should be reported to RIDOH through portal.ri.gov/reportcovidresult.

In accordance with FEMA requirements, non-profit nursing facilities and non-profit assisted living residences are eligible to receive point-of-care tests through the State's COVID-19 Community Testing Program (see additional attachment). If your organization is eligible and would like more information, please send an email to kerri.reilly.ctr@ohhs.ri.gov.

Facilities are encouraged to establish partnerships with laboratories to meet their future testing needs. Most clinical laboratories in Rhode Island can test respiratory specimens for COVID-19. If your facility does not have an existing partnership with a laboratory, or COVID-19 testing is not a service they currently offer, RIDOH will provide additional guidance on how to engage clinical testing partners.

Outbreak testing

Once a positive case has been identified, facilities should contact their assigned RIDOH case manager. RIDOH will evaluate strategies for outbreak testing on a case-by-case basis and may recommend point-of care testing or testing that is sent to a laboratory. Facilities should consider the following options for contact investigation.

Point-of-care testing:

- Facilities may use point-of-care tests for focused contact investigation if an outbreak occurs. All results should be reported to RIDOH through portal.ri.gov/reportcovidresult.
- Facilities should have policies in place for testing symptomatic residents and close contacts.
- Point-of-care testing may be supplemented by testing that is sent to a lab.

Laboratory-based testing:

- Throughout April 2022, the State will continue to provide swabbing and courier services for outbreak investigations if RIDOH determines that laboratory-based testing is necessary to supplement point-of-care testing.
- Effective May 1, 2022, State supported specimen collection services for outbreak testing will be discontinued. Facilities should work directly with a laboratory or courier service to arrange laboratory-based testing services for outbreak testing. Facilities with medical directors don't need permission from RIDOH to send specimens to a laboratory of their choosing.
- If a facility is experiencing difficulties establishing a partnership with a laboratory by May 1, 2022, reach out to your assigned case manager at RIDOH for assistance.

Thank you for your continued, dedication, collaboration, and flexibility throughout the COVID-19 response. If you have any questions about the above changes or recommendations, contact your assigned case manager at RIDOH.