Maine Health Alert Network (HAN) System

PUBLIC HEALTH ADVISORY

To: Health Care Providers  
From: Dr. Siiri Bennett, State Epidemiologist  
Subject: Updated Guidance for COVID-19 Testing- March 2020  
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Key Messages:
- U.S. CDC is now recommending collecting a single nasopharyngeal (NP) swab in viral transport media. Throat (OP) swabs are no longer required. If both swabs are used, they should be combined at collection in to a single vial.
- FDA has expanded options for specimen transport media.
- The Maine Health and Environmental Testing Laboratory (HETL) will no longer be running a respiratory viral panel with all submitted COVID-19 specimens.
Updated Guidance for COVID-19 Testing

Summary:


Summary of Changes for COVID-19 Testing and Specimen Collection:

• U.S. CDC is now recommending collecting a single nasopharyngeal (NP) swab in viral transport media. Throat (OP) swabs are no longer required. If both swabs are used, they should be combined at collection in to a single vial.
  o U.S. CDC does not recommend use of calcium alginate swabs or swabs with wooden shafts, as they may contain substances that inactivate some viruses and inhibit PCR testing.

• The FDA has expanded the list of allowable media in which specimens can be transported. New acceptable media include:
  o Liquid Amies-based transport media.
    ▪ Supplies:
      • E-Swab by Copan (Catalogue # 481C and 482C) with regular or flex minitip applicator
      • Opti-Swab by Puritan (Catalogue # LA-117), swab included in kit (Catalog#3317-H).
    ▪ Storage: Up to 72 hours at 4°C, or frozen for longer storage.
  o Dry swab in saline
    ▪ Supplies:
      • Copan: 501CS01, 503CS01, 516CS01, 518CS01 and 534CS01
    ▪ Storage: Up to 72 hours at 4°C, or frozen for longer storage.

• The Maine Health and Environmental Testing Laboratory (HETL) will no longer be running a respiratory viral panel with all submitted COVID-19 specimens.
  o HETL will perform testing for respiratory viruses, including as a panel, when indicated on the HETL specimen submission form, which can be found at mainepublichealth.gov/lab.

For more information:

• Maine CDC’s COVID-19 website www.maine.gov/dhhs/coronavirus or by calling Maine CDC at 1-800-821-5821.