

**To: Home Health and Hospice Agencies**

**From: New Mexico Department of Health**

**Date: December 23, 2020, updated July 9, 2021**

**Re: Letter of Direction**

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The Department of Health provides the following direction with respect to testing and vaccination activities related to COVID-19:

#### TESTING

- To maximize the expediency of test result turnaround times, home health and hospice agencies are directed to utilize the laboratory resource designated by the Department of Health - Curative. Facilities may not utilize a different laboratory.
- Home health and hospice employers **must ensure all unvaccinated employees are tested once per week for screening of COVID-19. Vaccinated staff do not have a routine testing requirement.**
  - All staff, regardless of whether they go into personal homes or into long-term care facilities to provide care are included in this requirement.
  - The frequency of testing may increase pending a positive employee in the workplace and/or need for rapid response following an exposure in the workplace.
- Anyone with symptoms should be tested immediately, not permitted to work, and isolate pending receipt of their test results.
- Agencies are required to comply with electronic requirements outlined by the vendor.
- Home health and hospice employers must provide written documentation of testing compliance to all long-term care facilities which receive the agencies services.
- Agencies should screen staff daily prior to visiting clients – a screening questionnaire can be found here: <https://www.cdc.gov/screening/paper-version.pdf>
- Home health and hospice providers must notify long-term care providers of any positive staff results within 4 hours.
- When possible, agencies should dedicate staff to the lowest number of facilities possible to decrease the potential spread of COVID-19.

➤ Point-of-Care Rapid Antigen Tests

- Some agencies may have procured machines and BinaxNOW rapid tests. The State of New Mexico directs agencies to use these antigen tests in the following circumstances only:
  - Symptomatic staff; and
  - Exposed staff (a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more in a 24-hour period, within 6 feet of a confirmed COVID-19 case)
  - Agencies should consult with the NM Department of Health if tests are used for additional circumstances, such as screening.

➤ Personal Protective Equipment

- All vaccinated direct care staff must wear a mask and either goggles or a face shield while providing direct client care.
- All unvaccinated direct care staff must wear a fit-tested N-95 mask in addition to a face shield or goggles while providing direct client care.
- Gowns, gloves, respirators and eye protection are still needed when caring for confirmed or suspected COVID patients, those in quarantine, when collecting specimens for COVID testing, and when indicated during other patient care per usual IPC practices not related to COVID.

Failure to follow these directives may result in citation, civil monetary penalty, or license revocation pursuant to the [New Mexico Administrative Code](#) and all applicable regulations to home health and hospice agencies.