



# Corona-Communique

17 March 2020

[www.ampath.co.za](http://www.ampath.co.za)

# Why we do not test healthy people for Coronavirus/COVID-19

Ampath has received many queries asking why we do not provide COVID laboratory testing for someone who is healthy, and has no symptoms suggestive of an infection.

There are a few reasons for this approach and we hope that once you have read this you will understand why such testing is not needed, and if it was performed, why it may put you, your family and all South Africans at risk whilst we are in the early containment phase of the pandemic in South Africa.

The current testing guidelines are developed by the National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD), and the Department of Health, in alignment with the World Health Organization protocols. Private laboratories that perform the test are legally required to follow these guidelines. As the situation evolves in South Africa, these guidelines will change and so will the testing protocols of the laboratories.

As of 16 March 2020, the current case definition that puts a person in the category of "at risk of COVID infection", is someone who has recently travelled to a country where there is local transmission of the virus AND who has symptoms of an acute respiratory illness: cough, fever and a sore throat being the most common initial symptoms. A person at risk of infection should be tested for the infection and should also self-isolate at home to prevent spreading the infection to others.

## Now what would be the possible consequences of testing someone who is totally well?

- A negative lab result will not mean that you are not infected. You may still be infected and in the early phase of the infection, and only days later develop symptoms. Thus a negative lab test in someone who is well, may be misleading and does not mean that they do not have a COVID infection.
- If you have travelled or have had contact with someone with suspected or known COVID infection, you will still need to stay at home in quarantine for 14 days if your lab result is negative.
- The biggest danger of testing people without symptoms is that you are very likely to test negative. You may then interpret this as being COVID-free and not self-quarantine. You may go back to work, go to the mall and travel while having an early infection, possibly developing symptoms days later and spreading the infection to your friends, family and other South Africans.
- There is a shortage of laboratory tests in South Africa. All affected countries are trying to access laboratory testing kits and test kits are in short supply. We need to reserve our valuable lab testing resources for those who are sick and in whom the test will have the greater value for the sake of protecting all South Africans.



## Key messages:

- If you have travelled to an affected country or have had contact with a person with a suspected or confirmed COVID infection, and you yourself are well, then stay at home for 14 days– “Self-Quarantine”. Should you become unwell with flu-like symptoms, only then go and get tested for COVID-19.
- If you have travelled to an affected country or have had contact with a person with a suspected or confirmed COVID infection and you have a flu-like illness, then stay at home for 14 days– “Self Isolate” and get a COVID-19 laboratory test. If you are very sick then go to your Doctor or your local ED as you may need to be admitted to hospital.
- Ampath will perform a COVID-19 laboratory test **ONLY** if you are symptomatic; ie. **FLU-LIKE SYMPTOMS** following possible exposure. Either your Doctor can refer you (even after a telephonic consultation with you), or you can self-refer to Ampath for a COVID test. You will need to provide your family Doctor’s name and contact details and inform your Doctor that you have had a COVID-19 test so that he can expect the results and contact you with when he receives them.
- If you have flu-like symptoms, it is preferable for you to contact your Doctor for assessment to determine if you meet the NICD case definition for COVID-19 testing. If you do, your Doctor will then either collect the samples himself or refer you to a designated laboratory sample collection site. However, if it is not possible to consult with your Doctor, then you can go directly to a designated Ampath COVID-19 sample collection site where the staff will be able to assist you.
- Self-referral means that you can walk into a designated COVID-19 Ampath collection centre and ask for the test after telephonically consulting with your Doctor. You need to provide your Doctor’s name and contact details on the Ampath request form. You can self-refer only if you are unwell and have a flu-like illness and have travelled recently or have had contact with a suspected or known infected person.
- If you come to an Ampath collection centre for a COVID test, please print out the required forms (Patient Under Investigation and Contact Tracing forms) and fill in as much as you can before coming in for the test. These forms can be accessed at:  
<https://j9z5g3w2.stackpathcdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/COVID-19-PUI-form-v4.3-3Apr2020.pdf>
- If you are well, your employer cannot force you to have a laboratory test to prove that you are not infected before you can work. Remember, a negative lab result does not mean that you are not infected. You may have an early infection and not yet be showing symptoms. Your employer may, however, ask you to self-quarantine for 14 days.
- A negative laboratory test result, if performed on a person who is well, does not constitute a medical certificate to certify you COVID free. There is no such thing as a “COVID-free medical certificate”.

Please assist us in keeping your fellow South Africans as safe as possible from infection with this virus by **ONLY** going to a designated COVID-19 sample collection site. Please do not go to non-designated Ampath Depots as this places other patients and Ampath staff at risk of infection.



## Self-Quarantine: Who and How?

Self-quarantine for COVID-19 is recommended for individuals who have been directly exposed to the virus or who have travelled to areas where there are large numbers of people infected with the novel coronavirus. The purpose of self-quarantine is to prevent further transmission of the virus should you be infected.

### Self-quarantine steps

- Stay home. Only go out if you need medical care.
- Monitor your symptoms: Fever, cough, shortness of breath.
- Get medical attention as soon as possible if you become ill. This will require you to be tested for COVID-19.
- Make sure you know, and follow, the steps to seeking care.

### Self-quarantine practices

- Do not go to work, school, or public areas. Avoid using public transportation, or taxis.
- Separate yourself from other people in your home. If you can, use a separate bathroom.
- Facemasks should be used to help prevent the spread of the disease to others. Cough or sneeze into the fold of your elbow. Alternatively, cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
- Clean your hands often. With soap and water for at least 20 seconds or with an alcohol-based hand sanitiser that contains 60-72% alcohol.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Clean surfaces like counters, table tops, doorknobs, bathroom fixtures, toilets, phones, keyboards, tablets, and bedside tables every day.

### Adapted from:

<https://sacoronavirus.co.za/2020/03/15/covid-19-self-quarantine-guidelines/>

### The steps to seeking care are:

- Call your Doctor or Hospital's Casualty Department and tell them that you have, or are being evaluated for, COVID-19.
- Should you go and see a Doctor then put on a facemask before you enter the healthcare facility and wash your hands with a product that contains 70% alcohol or a 70 % alcohol solution.
- If you go to an Ampath collection centre for testing, make sure that you complete the required forms beforehand and bring these along. You can access these at:  
<https://j9z5g3w2.stackpathcdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/COVID-19-PUI-form-v4.3-3Apr2020.pdf>

