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TO: Health Care Providers, Health Care Facilities, and Local Health Departments
FROM: New York State Department of Health

Guidance: Protocol for COVID-19 Testing Applicable for Pregnant People and Support Persons

Background:

Amid the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) continues to monitor the situation and work to expand COVID-19 diagnostic and serologic testing for New Yorkers. As part of its April 2020 report, *Recommendations to the Governor to Promote Increased Choice and Access to Safe Maternity Care During the COVID-19 Pandemic*, the Governor's COVID-19 Maternity Task Force (Task Force) recommended universal COVID-19 testing for all pregnant individuals and support persons accompanying pregnant individuals in all birthing settings, including general hospitals and birthing centers, as testing becomes available.

This guidance sets forth the recommendations necessary to implement the two components of this Task Force recommendation: (1) universal COVID-19 testing of all pregnant individuals and (2) universal COVID-19 testing of support persons accompanying pregnant individuals in all birthing settings.

I. Guidance for COVID-19 Testing of All Pregnant Individuals:

On April 17, 2020, Executive Order 202.19 required the establishment of a single, statewide coordinated testing prioritization process that requires all laboratories in the state, both public and private, that conduct COVID-19 diagnostic testing, to complete such COVID-19 diagnostic testing only in accordance with such process. Guidance published on May 31, 2020 entitled, *Updated Interim Guidance: Protocol for COVID-19 Testing Applicable to All Health Care Providers and Local Health Departments*, instructed health care providers that pregnant persons are one of the priority groups for COVID-19 testing. This is especially critical due to recent research from CDC, identifying increased risk of severe illness among pregnant persons, and increased risk of adverse pregnancy outcomes, such as preterm birth, among pregnant people with COVID-19.

Consistent with this prioritization of pregnant individuals for COVID-19 testing, and to implement the Task Force's recommendation, NYSDOH recommends that pregnant individuals must be tested during pregnancy and within one week prior to their estimated due date or upon admission if second test is not conducted one week prior to delivery.

Additionally, NYSDOH recommends the following policies and procedures to implement prioritization of testing pregnant individuals for COVID-19:

- Providers should develop a policy to routinely test their pregnant patients for COVID-19.

- Based on individual clinical factors, health care providers should use clinical judgement to determine the appropriate COVID-19 test(s) (i.e. diagnostic or serologic) that should be obtained during pregnancy, preferably during the third trimester.
- Pregnant individuals should also be tested as close to delivery as possible, ideally within one week prior. All pregnant patients must be tested for COVID-19 using a molecular assay for detection of SARS-CoV-2 RNA prior to delivery.
- Where point of care, rapid testing is available, pregnant patients should be tested upon arrival at the hospital or birthing center for delivery or within 24-48 hours prior for scheduled deliveries.
- If rapid testing is not available, providers should develop a local mechanism for testing their pregnant patients.
 - Providers who conduct testing in the office setting will need testing kits and appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE). When performing a test with a nasopharyngeal swab, a mask, gown, gloves, goggles, or a face shield should be worn.
- If the provider does not have access to testing, the provider can work with the pregnant individual to access the State's testing sites. The pregnant individual can call the New York State COVID-19 Hotline at 1-888-364-3065 or visit the NYSDOH website <https://covid19screening.health.ny.gov/> to have an appointment set up at one of the State's Testing Sites.

If the testing is performed prior to admission to the hospital or birthing facility, patients should be counseled to do the following for the days before the delivery:

- maintain the current social distancing recommendations,
- follow other preventative measures such as wearing a face mask or cloth face covering in public when social distancing might not be possible,
- minimize trips away from the home as much as possible,
- cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing or use the inside of your elbow.
- keep your hands clean (wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds). Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, if soap and water are not available.
- avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.
- avoid close contact with people who are sick,
- inform the healthcare provider performing the delivery if there is any contact with a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 or a person with symptoms consistent with COVID-19, and
- inform the healthcare provider of any symptoms consistent with COVID-19 or a positive test for COVID-19.

II. Guidance for Testing All Support Persons Accompanying Pregnant Individuals at Birthing Facilities:

As testing becomes increasingly available, support persons may also be tested, either at the hospital or birthing center upon admission for delivery or prior to accompanying the pregnant patient to the hospital or birth center. Hospitals and birth centers may develop their own policies about support person testing, based on capacity of the facility and testing capabilities.

Policies should include:

- Documentation of test results for support person(s) (includes doula and support person); and
- If no documentation of test results is available and support person is asymptomatic, allow support person to accompany pregnant individual with appropriate PPE.

Policies should also follow DOH guidance from May 20, 2020 entitled, *Health Advisory: COVID-19 Updated Guidance for Hospital Operators Regarding Visitation*.

Providers may contact the Department when there are questions about availability of testing kits and PPE at covidproviderinfo@health.ny.gov .

Additional Resources:

- [NYS DOH COVID-19 Website](#)
- [NYS Local Health Department Directory](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) COVID-19 Website](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report: Characteristics of Women of Reproductive Age with Laboratory-Confirmed SARS-CoV-2 Infection by Pregnancy Status – United States, January 22-June 7, 2020.](#)
- [World Health Organization \(WHO\) COVID-19 Website](#)