
PUBLIC HEALTH ADVISORY
STATUS UPDATE ON COVID-19 IN THE
COACHELLA VALLEY
MARCH 10, 2020

Background

On March 8, 2019, Riverside County proclaimed a **public health emergency** due to the first locally acquired case of COVID-19 recorded in a hospitalized patient at Eisenhower Health in Rancho Mirage. This individual has no known connection to any Riverside County school. After a diligent investigation, the Department of Public Health has found no evidence this individual traveled to a high-prevalence area, had contact to a known case or had contact with any returning traveler from a high-prevalence area. The Department therefore concludes **this case represents community transmission in the Coachella Valley** and that the virus is present and circulating in that region.

Subsequently three additional individuals in the Coachella Valley have tested positive, but these individuals either had travel to a known high-prevalence area or a known exposure. Riverside County currently now has six cases of COVID-19 in County residents, two in individuals presently hospitalized outside of the County.

Providers and health care facilities are therefore advised that **alternative requirements may apply** to testing, containment and quarantine **in the Coachella Valley**.

No Cases in Western Riverside County

To date **no confirmed cases** have been detected in **western Riverside County**. While there is some suspicion that community spread throughout the County is inevitable, **operational requirements remain unchanged** in this region. Individuals who work in both regions may be held to the stricter standard depending on facility location.

Testing Instructions for All County Regions

Testing **asymptomatic** individuals is still **not recommended** except where a known COVID-19 exposure exists, even in the Coachella Valley.

Individuals with **fever** and **respiratory symptoms** should still be screened for flu and other respiratory viruses, and rapid strep if pharyngitis is present. The CDC has guidelines for determining who may qualify as a Person Under Investigation (PUI) at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/hcp/clinical-criteria.html> .

At least **two commercial laboratories** (Quest and LabCorp) have indicated availability of testing. **Testing through commercial labs does not require health department approval.** Providers must collect specimens **under respiratory isolation in appropriate PPE** as directed by the laboratories, and questions should be directed to their clinical operations. **All persons meeting the PUI criteria** prior to testing and **any positive COVID-19 results** must be **reported immediately** to the Department of Public Health by **telephone** at 951 358 5107 during business hours or 951 782 2974 after hours.

Testing can still be performed through the Department of Public Health. **Testing requested through the Department of Public Health requires approval.** Please call 951 358 5107 during business hours, or after hours 951 782 2974 for on-call if urgent or emergent. When obtaining the history of a suspected case of COVID-19, **be prepared to present** to the Department of Public Health the following information to evaluate the case:

- Symptoms (fever, cough, other lower respiratory symptoms)
- Date of onset
- Travel dates (including **specific cities or regions visited** and **when**). For many countries the specific region is vital to determining exact risk.
- Individuals this person was exposed to who may have COVID-19, and information on why you suspect them to be meaningful exposures. The highest level of concern involves **household contacts**.
- Other testing. **Influenza should be ruled out:** flu and COVID-19 disease are difficult to distinguish clinically, and influenza B activity in the county is still significant. The Department also strongly advises obtaining a **respiratory viral panel** and considering a **rapid strep** test if pharyngitis is noted. You may be required to complete other initial testing before specimens are accepted by Public Health.

In general stopovers in countries less than 8 hours in duration are not considered meaningful exposures, nor are sick individuals on planes who are not sitting near or adjacent to the individual in question, especially if COVID-19 was never confirmed. Testing generally requires oropharyngeal and nasopharyngeal swabs. Courier service to pick up specimens can be arranged for many locations. If you are unable or unwilling to collect specimens, please notify the Department to consider an alternative.

Hospital Guidance when Exposed to a COVID-19 Patient

Hospitals should refer to current CDC guidance at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/guidance-risk-assesment-hcp.html> . In general, HCWs in **appropriate PPE** at all times are **not at risk**.

Individuals (including health care workers) exposed to a known case of COVID-19 without full PPE, depending on the length of exposure and extent of equipment worn, may be **subject to quarantine for up to**

14 days and may receive a health officer order compelling them to do so. In **western Riverside County**, where community spread is not currently demonstrated, **no exceptions** will be granted.

In the **Coachella Valley**, where community spread is currently demonstrated, a facility that is being **severely impacted** by quarantined or isolated staff involuntarily off work may request a waiver from the Department of Public Health. The **waiver** would enable **asymptomatic, afebrile health care workers** to return to work **with a face mask** during the time they would have ordinarily been excluded. Daily temperature and symptom checks would still be required, and even mild symptoms would completely disqualify them.

To qualify for this waiver, affected facilities **must activate their surge staffing plan** and provide the following **documentation in writing**:

- An attestation their surge staffing plan is active
- An attestation that the quality of care at their facility is being impacted by the loss of staff on quarantine or isolation
- A list of other alternative staffing plans
- An attestation that these staffing plans are impossible, infeasible or did not yield sufficient staff

Waiver requests should be discussed with Disease Control at 951 358 5107 during business hours before submitting documentation.

We appreciate your help in keeping all residents of Riverside County healthy.

###