



# SEVERE ACUTE RESPIRATORY SYNDROME

## LETTER

## Letter to Health-Care Providers

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)  
1600 Clifton Road, MS A-34  
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Information regarding SARS laboratory testing may change. For the most current information and up-to-date version of this document, see [www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars/diagnosis.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars/diagnosis.htm).

Dear Health-Care Provider,

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the World Health Organization continue to investigate the international outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS). A novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV) has been identified as the cause of this disease. In the United States, SARS cases are currently being classified as suspect or probable based on the severity of clinical respiratory symptoms (see [www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars/casedefinition.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars/casedefinition.htm) for the current case-definition). However, new laboratory tests are available that can be used to detect markers of SARS-CoV in clinical specimens.

State and local public health laboratories are receiving from CDC the technology for two of these new diagnostic methods: an enzyme immunoassay (EIA) for detecting antibodies to SARS-CoV in serum specimens, and a reverse transcription polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR) test for detecting viral RNA in respiratory specimens. These laboratory methods are not yet licensed; therefore, specific guidance has been developed for patient consent, submission of specimens, and interpretation of SARS EIA and RT-PCR test results. This letter provides instructions for collection and submission of specimens for SARS testing by either or both of these methods. Additional documents related to investigational SARS laboratory testing are described at the end of this letter.

Health-care providers may submit serum specimens (for EIA) and/or respiratory specimens (for RT-PCR) to participating state and local public health laboratories by following these steps:

1. First report any suspect or probable case of SARS to your state or local health department immediately (for a listing of state/local health departments, see [www.cdc.gov/other.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/other.htm)). Health department approval may be needed prior to testing being performed.
2. Because these assays are experimental, it is strongly advised that health-care providers utilize the informed consent forms we have provided and obtain written consent from patients prior to collection of specimens for testing. If testing by both methods is requested, please complete both the EIA informed consent form ([www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars/lab/eia/consent.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars/lab/eia/consent.htm)) and the RT-PCR consent form ([www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars/lab/rtpcr/consent.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars/lab/rtpcr/consent.htm)) for each patient. If testing by only one of the methods is desired, complete the consent form for that method only. (Note: Although not optimal, if for whatever reason the informed consent process is not utilized and written informed consent is not obtained, the specimens can still be submitted to the laboratory for testing.)

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3. Please note that each consent form has two sections for the patient's signature. The first section is for the patient's consent for SARS testing to be performed at the state or local public health laboratory. The second section is for the patient's consent for long-term storage of any remaining portion of the specimen after SARS testing.
4. Collect the appropriate specimens for SARS laboratory testing: acute-phase blood for the EIA, and respiratory specimens (i.e., nasopharyngeal wash or aspirate, nasopharyngeal or throat swabs) for the RT-PCR test. See CDC's web site for specific instructions for specimen collection ([www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars/specimen\\_collection\\_sars2.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars/specimen_collection_sars2.htm)) and specimen packing/transport ([www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars/packingspecimens-sars.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars/packingspecimens-sars.htm)).
5. Submit specimens with consent form(s) and a completed specimen submission form ([www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars/pdf/specimensubmissionform-sars.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars/pdf/specimensubmissionform-sars.pdf)) to your state or local public health laboratory ([www.cdc.gov/other.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/other.htm)) for testing.
6. Final test results, together with a fact sheet for interpreting SARS EIA and RT-PCR results ([www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars/clinicians.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars/clinicians.htm)), and a patient information and consent for long term storage and future testing sheet for the EIA ([www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars/lab/eia/participant.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars/lab/eia/participant.htm)) and/or the RT-PCR ([www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars/lab/rtpcr/participant.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars/lab/rtpcr/participant.htm)) will be provided to you through your state or local public health laboratory or the state health department.
7. If the patient consents, leftover specimens will be stored at the CDC for future SARS-related research. CDC will report the results of any future tests that may be relevant to your patient's health to the submitting health-care provider. You will be responsible for providing the test results to your patient.

Information about SARS laboratory testing, including the documents described in this letter, an Interim Guidance for Those Patients with Mild or Asymptomatic Infection ([www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars/lab/icguidance.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars/lab/icguidance.htm)), and a letter from CDC's Deputy Associate Director for Science ([www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars/lab/adsletter051503.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars/lab/adsletter051503.htm)) are available on the web sites of CDC ([www.cdc.gov/](http://www.cdc.gov/)) and the Association of Public Health Laboratories ([www.aphl.org/](http://www.aphl.org/)).

For additional information about SARS laboratory testing, contact your state or local public laboratory.

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For more information, visit [www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars) or call the CDC public response hotline at (888) 246-2675 (English), (888) 246-2857 (Español), or (866) 874-2646 (TTY)

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