

Aug. 21, 2020: Advocacy spotlight on Considerations regarding SARS-CoV-2 diagnostic testing guidelines

Following a letter the AMA sent to Secretary Alex Azar urging the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to update its SARS-CoV-2 diagnostic testing guidelines, AMA created a series of resource documents for physicians and the general public concerning diagnostic testing for SARS-CoV-2. The documents provide considerations for responsible use of limited testing resources that physicians and their patients should consider when seeking polymerase chain reaction (PCR) diagnostic testing. The supply chain for PCR testing components continues to be under strain, with hospital and academic laboratories reporting inconsistent supplies of reagents and viral transport media, as well as new and increasing shortages of plastic components, such as pipette tips. Overwhelming demand for PCR diagnostic tests has resulted in delays in the return of test results at large reference laboratories and health departments nationwide. The new resource documents are aimed at encouraging physicians and the public to be good stewards of limited resources by prioritizing PCR diagnostic testing services for those with a medical need, such as those with COVID-19 symptoms, those with a known exposure to someone with COVID-19, those in need of pre-procedure testing and health care workers. AMA guidance further suggests that physicians should consider avoiding ordering a PCR diagnostic test for those without a medically-indicated need for those tests, such as for those wishing to participate in social gatherings, wishing to engage in non-essential travel, or wishing to return to work or school. Guidelines are subject to change should demand for testing services decrease, supply availability improves or as availability of new types of testing increases.

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