

**TO: ALL SMS MEMBERS/ CHIEF DIRECTORATES / DIRECTORATES / REGIONAL / DISTRICT OFFICES, SUB-STRUCTURES / ALL FACILITY MANAGERS/ CITY OF CAPE TOWN**

**CIRCULAR H 222 OF 2020 - UPDATED CORONAVIRUS PCR TESTING CRITERIA (DECEMBER 2020)**

**Purpose**

To modify the provincial PCR testing criteria, to allow our staff to cope with and respond in the most effective and efficient manner to the upsurge (second wave) of COVID-19 infections. This circular replaces the previous circulars in this regard i.e. Circular H175/2020 and Circular H186/2020.

**Background**

Given that the coronavirus epidemic is rapidly increasing along with a significant trauma load and a return to comprehensive services, our ability to swab for PCR testing and respond appropriately to PCR test results, is limited.

The number of infections has already exceeded the first wave in the Garden Route district and is poised to exceed the first wave in the Cape Town Metro.

Given the above we are obliged to restrict the PCR testing of people who might have COVID-19, to those who absolutely need to be tested. We would then advise those people with coronavirus symptoms, but whom we do not test, that they probably have COVID-19 and hence should follow appropriate isolation procedures and their close contacts should quarantine themselves.

Those who absolutely need to be tested are:

- Those who might act as a conduit for further superspreading of coronavirus within a restricted ecosystem, such as those people residing in large group confined spaces, including old age homes, care homes, hostels and prisons.
- Those who are at increased risk of developing severe disease, which would include those aged >45 years and those, irrespective of their age, who have the following co-existing illnesses: Diabetes, High blood pressure, Heart disease, Lung disease, Kidney disease, Cancer, Tuberculosis and HIV (if not on ARVs).

Whilst in the Cape Town metro the challenges of PCR testing are most acutely felt, the rural areas have managed to maintain the ability to take swabs for PCR testing despite rising COVID-19 infections. Hence a differential approach to testing is proposed for the Rural and Cape Town Metro areas, with the Rural areas having more expansive testing criteria, while the Cape Town Metro areas will have more restricted testing criteria.

## **Policy Position**

### **The PCR Testing Criteria are modified to the following situations:**

1. People with coronavirus symptoms admitted to hospital
2. People with coronavirus symptoms AND who reside in large group confined spaces (old age homes, care homes, hostels, prisons)
3. In the Rural areas: All people with coronavirus symptoms
4. In the Cape Town Metro area: People with coronavirus symptoms AND who are at high risk of severe disease (those aged >45 years; those of any age who have one or more of the following co-morbidities: Diabetes, High blood pressure, Heart disease, Lung disease, Kidney disease, Cancer, Tuberculosis and HIV [if not on ARVs]).
5. Pre-operative testing of coronavirus *asymptomatic* patients awaiting surgery (should be tested 3 days or less before their operation).
6. Natural deaths occurring at home who had coronavirus symptoms.
7. All Health Care Workers with coronavirus symptoms
8. Health Care Workers who are in quarantine and *asymptomatic* at day 7 (to allow early return to work).
9. Those who previously tested PCR positive, but have developed new coronavirus symptoms, should only be tested 90 days after their first PCR test.

While the above criteria would cover the vast majority of circumstances, it is accepted that not all possible circumstances can be pro-actively provided for, and hence for unusual circumstances the attending clinician should exercise their clinical judgement around whether to provide a PCR test to a patient, or not, based on the specific clinical picture.



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