



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

**CIRCULAR H175 OF 2020 - EXPANSION OF CORONAVIRUS PCR TESTING CRITERIA**

**Purpose**

The purpose of this circular is to propose the implementation of expanded criteria for coronavirus PCR testing, given that the coronavirus epidemic is in decline and the PCR testing capacity has increased.

**Background**

Due to reduced PCR testing capacity, strict PCR testing criteria were developed and implemented since the beginning of June 2020. These criteria are listed below.

Current PCR Testing Criteria

1. People with coronavirus symptoms admitted to hospital
2. Health Care Workers who develop coronavirus symptoms
3. Health Care Workers who are in quarantine and asymptomatic at day 8 but need to return to work
4. People with symptoms of coronavirus in clusters but in low prevalence discrete small areas (Rural Areas) where containment is still possible
5. People at high risk of severe disease (those aged >55 years with coronavirus symptoms; those of any age with coronavirus symptoms and with one or more of the co-morbidities; people in care homes and old age home with coronavirus symptoms) in high prevalence areas such as the Cape Metro.

A considerable increase in PCR testing capacity has allowed the addition of further criteria.

These additional criteria are listed in the revised policy position below and a further rationale is provided in Annexure A. In the Rural Districts, where testing has continued in an unrestricted manner

due to the slower onset and lower prevalence of COVID-19, the testing criteria will remain the same except that the amongst the expanded criteria below, criteria 1 and 2 would be added.

### **Policy Position**

The testing criteria are expanded to include testing patients in the following situations:

1. Pre-operative testing of coronavirus *asymptomatic* patients awaiting surgery.
2. Natural deaths occurring at home who had coronavirus symptoms
3. "Other public sector essential workers" (SAPS, correctional services, firefighters, municipal utilities, Eskom) who have coronavirus symptoms.
4. Offenders incarcerated in correctional facilities who have coronavirus symptoms.
5. Learners and staff in the educational sector attending school who have coronavirus symptoms.
6. Workers at workplaces who have coronavirus symptoms.

If after implementing the above criteria there is still sufficient swabbing and PCR testing capacity available to include further categories of patients in the testing criteria, then the addition of other categories will be considered.

Yours sincerely



**Dr Keith Cloete**

**Head: Western Cape Department of Health**

**Date: 2 September 2020**