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TAG POLICY LETTER
NO. 24-02

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Testing of Veteran Haven Residents, Youth Challenge Academy Cadets and Staff for COVID-19 Policy

1. Purpose

The purpose of this Policy is to establish procedures and guidelines for testing of Staff, Veteran Haven Residents (Resident), Youth Challenge Academy Cadets (Cadet), personnel, and other individuals entering the Veterans Havens facilities and the Youth Challenge Academy for detection of COVID-19. The Department of Military and Veterans Affairs is committed to complying with all New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH) Directives regarding testing along with the NJDOH and Centers for Disease Control (CDC) reporting requirements of test results. The facilities will collaborate with local and/or state health departments for guidance regarding requirements for participation ongoing COVID-19 testing. Facilities may implement additional infection prevention and control measures based on policies and procedures and risk assessment.

2. Requirements for Performing COVID-19 Testing in the Veterans Havens facilities and the Youth Challenge Academy (YCA):

- a. Only Point of Care (POC) tests that have received an Emergency Use Authorization or approval from the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) may be used for COVID-19 testing in the facilities.
- b. Any licensed healthcare provider, or medically-supervised trained personnel may collect a specimen and process an FDA approved or FDA Emergency Use authorization SARS- COV-2 viral test in the facilities.
- c. Licensed healthcare providers (HCP) and medically supervised trained personnel collecting a specimen shall follow CDC guidelines for collecting, handling, and testing for COVID-19 and in a manner consistent with the test manufacturer's instructions.
- d. Out of an abundance of caution, a licensed healthcare provider shall report positive COVID-19 test results of Cadets and Residents to the respective local health department.

3. Obtaining Test Results

The personnel collecting the specimen shall provide the individual submitting to the test with the following:

- a. Information for contacting the local health official within the jurisdiction where the individual resides.
- b. Information on obtaining follow-up medical care if the individual's test results are positive for COVID-19 (in accordance with CDC and/or the NJDOH guidance). (Attachment 1)
- c. Positive COVID-19 Notification (Attachment 2)

4. COVID-19 Tests Performed in the Facilities

a. **Antigen Tests for SARS-CoV:** Antigen tests are immunoassays that detect the presence of a specific viral antigen (protein of the virus,) which implies current viral infection. Antigen tests are currently authorized to be performed on nasopharyngeal or nasal swab specimens placed directly into the assay's extraction buffer or reagent. Antigen tests are rapid POC tests designed to be performed on site and will give a faster COVID-19 diagnostic test result (usually within twenty (20) minutes).

Note: Antigen tests may be performed in the facilities for the following individuals and/or upon request when the following conditions are present:

- Asymptomatic Cadet for initial testing after a newly positive Cadet or staff member is confirmed.
- Cadet who frequently/regularly leave the facilities for other medical appointments.
- Testing of staff and Cadets during an outbreak at the YCA.
- Testing of non-staff members entering the facilities upon request (except emergency medical staff during an emergency).
- Testing of staff returning from a work exclusion prior to beginning their shift.
- Admissions/Re-admissions of Cadets who were out of the facility for greater than 24 hours.
- Upon request of a Resident.

5. Testing Process:

a. Personnel performing the test shall be trained in the COVID-19 testing process in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions for performing the Antigen test. The individual obtaining the nasopharyngeal or nasal swab specimens shall follow CDC guidelines for collecting, handling, and testing for COVID-19, including wearing of full PPE, which includes N95 respirator mask, eye protection, gloves, and isolation gown. Removal of gloves and hand hygiene shall be performed after each specimen is obtained and processed.

b. Equipment that will be used for subsequent testing shall be disinfected between uses.

c. **Testing at the YCA:** Testing for COVID-19 will be done to the greatest extent possible. Rapid testing will be performed on any Cadet who is identified with symptoms consistent with COVID-19. If testing capacity is limited, testing will be directed to Cadets and the HCP who are, or have been, in close contact with the newly confirmed positive COVID-19 individual, such as residing with or working on the same unit or floor, or for HCP who work in other facilities where there are known SARS-CoV-2 infections.

d. **Testing at the Havens:** Testing of Residents for COVID-19 are strongly encouraged but are optional.

6. Testing of Admission/Readmissions for Cadets and Residents Leaving the Facilities for 24 Hours or Longer

a. Testing at the YCA should be performed on admission and, if negative, again 48 hours after the first negative test and, if negative, again 48 hours after the second negative test. Cadets who leave the facility for 24 hours or more should generally be managed as an admission. Cadets are encouraged to wear source control for ten (10) days following their admission, regardless of vaccine status.

b. Testing at the Havens is not required for Residents upon admission, or upon their return to the facility after 24 hours or longer. Residents at the Havens are strongly encouraged to test.

7. Diagnostic and Surveillance Testing**a. Outbreak Testing of Residents, Cadets and Staff**

1) Outbreak testing at the YCA will be conducted if there is a new confirmed case (Cadet or Staff) in the facility.

2) Any Cadet at the YCA who develops symptoms consistent with COVID-19 (per prescriber order) will be promptly tested for COVID-19, regardless of the interval between the most recent negative test and symptom onset, shall be placed on Transmission-Based Precautions while test results are pending.

3) Any Resident or Cadet who tests positive or is symptomatic will be placed on Transmission-Based Precautions (TBP) in a single room or room without a roommate and will remain in their room with the door closed, to the extent possible. The Resident or Cadet will be monitored for symptoms of COVID-19 and will wear a face mask (as tolerated,) while care is being provided.

4) Exposure testing will be conducted for any Cadet at the YCA who have been identified as a close contact to a COVID-19 positive individual. Exposure testing will be done on Day 1, 3, and 5 after the exposure (day of exposure is considered Day 0).

Note: The YCA and Veteran Havens may elect to perform routine testing of Staff to protect the Cadets, Residents and other Staff from exposure to SARS-CoV-2RNA.

5) “Up to date with COVID-19 vaccination” means that workers in these settings received a primary series (either a 2-dose primary series of a COVID-19 vaccine or a single dose primary series COVID-19 vaccine) and the first booster dose for which they are eligible, as recommended by the CDC.

- All Staff regardless of vaccination are encouraged to be tested during outbreak investigation, exposure, or close contact with a COVID-19 positive individual, and/or when Staff present symptoms consistent with COVID-19.

- All Staff on each shift must log and screen everyone entering the facility regardless of their vaccination status.

- When the facility has received no COVID-19 positive results for Cadets for the period of required testing, the facility may collaborate with their local health department and/or the NJ Department of Health to determine additional guidance for frequency and duration of serial testing to be implemented in their ongoing COVID-19 testing program.

- Any Staff who develops symptoms consistent with COVID-19 may receive an Antigen test. The Staff may be excluded from work pending the results and referred to Human Resources for further guidance .

b. The YCA and Havens should test Cadets, Residents, and Staff for COVID-19 as follows:

Testing Trigger	Staff	Cadets/Residents
Symptomatic individual identified	Staff with signs or symptoms are to be tested, regardless of COVID-19 vaccination status.	Cadet/Resident with signs or symptoms are to be tested, regardless of COVID-19 vaccination status.
Newly identified COVID-19 positive Staff, Resident, Cadet in a facility that can identify close contacts	Test all Staff, regardless of COVID-19 vaccination status, who had a higher-risk exposure with a COVID-19 positive individual.	Test all Cadets/Residents, regardless of COVID-19 vaccination status, who had close contact with a COVID-19 positive individual.
Newly identified COVID-19 positive Staff, Resident, Cadet in a facility that is unable to identify close contacts	Test all Staff, facility-wide or at a group level, if Staff are assigned to a specific location where the new case occurred (e.g. unit, floor, or specific area(s) of the facility), regardless of COVID-19 vaccination status.	Test all Cadets/Residents, facility-wide or at a group level (e.g. unit, floor, or other specific area(s) of the facility), regardless of COVID-19 vaccination status.

8. Documentation of Test Results

- a. The facility will document that testing has been completed and the maintain the results of each test.
- b. Documentation will be made in the Staff's, Resident's or Cadet's records that testing was offered, completed, (per Staff's, Resident's or Cadet's testing status,) and the results of each test.

9. Refusal to Participate in COVID-19 Testing

a. Residents and Cadets may exercise their right to decline COVID-19 testing (42 CFR 483.10(c)(6)). Staff should use a person-centered approach when discussing the importance of testing for COVID-19 with the Resident. Alternative specimen collection sources (such as anterior nares) may also be considered for Residents or Cadets who refuse COVID-19 testing.

1) Residents and Cadets exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19 and refuse testing shall be placed on Transmission-Based Precautions (TBP) until the criteria for discontinuing TBP has been met.

2) During outbreak testing at the YCA, an asymptomatic Cadet who refuses to be tested for COVID-19 should be monitored closely for symptoms of COVID-19. Vigilant efforts should be made to ensure the Cadet remains at an appropriate distance from other Cadets, wears a face covering, and practices effective hand hygiene.

3) Residents who decline testing are encouraged to remain at an appropriate distance from other Residents, wear a face covering, and practice effective hand hygiene.

4) Documentation should be made in the Resident's or Cadet's record if they refuse, or decline, to be tested for COVID-19.

b. Staff may refuse, but are strongly encouraged to test for COVID-19 when directed, during outbreak investigation and testing, exposure, or when returning from a work exclusion.

c. Non-Staff Members (i.e. contracted workers) seeking entry into the facilities are subject to the current COVID-19 testing policies of the facility. The individual will not be allowed entry into the facility if they are positive for COVID-19.

10. Shortage of Testing Supplies. When there is an emergent shortage of testing supplies, immediately contact the PPE Coordinator with the Department's Fiscal and Administrative Services Division. Additionally, local and State health departments can be contacted to assist in testing efforts or in obtaining supplies.

11. Discontinuation of COVID-19 Transmission-Based Precautions may be based on test or time:

Any Resident or Cadet who was placed on Transmission-Based Precautions must continue to wear source control until symptoms have resolved or, for those who never developed symptoms, until they meet the criteria to end isolation.

a. The criteria for the test-based strategy are:

- 1) Residents or Cadets who are symptomatic:
 - Resolution of fever without the use of fever-reducing medications; or
 - Symptoms (e.g., cough, shortness of breath) have improved; or
 - Results are negative from at least two (2) consecutive respiratory specimens collected ≥ 24 hours apart (total of two (2) negative specimens) tested using an antigen test or NAAT administered by their HCP.

2) Residents or Cadets who are not symptomatic:

- Results are negative from at least two (2) consecutive respiratory specimens collected ≥ 24 hours apart (total of two (2) negative specimens) tested using an antigen test or NAAT administered by their HCP; or
- The decision to discontinue empiric Transmission-Based Precautions by excluding the diagnosis of current SARS-CoV-2 infection for a resident or cadet with suspected SARS-CoV-2 infection can be made based upon having negative results from at least one respiratory specimen tested using an FDA-authorized COVID-19 viral test; or
- If a higher level of clinical suspicion for SARS-CoV-2 infection exists, consider maintaining Transmission-Based Precautions and performing a second test for SARS-CoV-2 RNA.

b. **The criteria for the time-based strategy are:**

1) Residents or Cadets who are symptomatic:

- At least ten (10) days have passed since symptoms first appeared;
- At least 24 hours have passed since last fever without the use of fever-reducing medications; and
- Symptoms (e.g., cough, shortness of breath) have improved.

2) Residents or Cadets who are not symptomatic:

- At least ten (10) days have passed since symptoms first appeared since the date of their first positive viral test.

c. Ultimately, clinical judgement and suspicion of SARS-CoV-2 infection determine whether to continue or discontinue empiric Transmission-Based Precautions.

12. Veterans Haven and Youth Challenge Academy Staff Who Test Positive:

a. Staff who test positive should remain out of work for a minimum of seven (7) calendar days and may return to work on the 8th day, with a negative test taken on the 5th and 7th day. Day zero is first day of the positive test result.

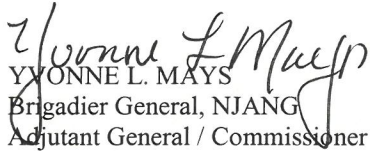
b. Staff who return to work following a positive result, must take added precaution over the next five (5) days, such as taking additional steps for cleaner air, hygiene, masks, physical distancing, and/or when you will be around other people indoors.

c. Staff who test positive must immediately notify the Human Resources Division for further guidance and proper payroll coding.

d. Staff who are absent for five (5) or more working days must submit a medical note to the Human Resources Division to excuse their absences. Staff who are absent for more than ten (10) consecutive working days from the initial test result must contact Human Resources for a leave of absence (Family Medical Leave Act) and must submit acceptable medical documentation.

13. References:

- a. CDC Testing Guide for Nursing Homes, June 13, 2020
- b. CDC Healthcare Prevention and Control FAQs for COVID-19, June 5, 2020
- c. CMS Reopening Document, May 18, 2020
- d. NJDOH memorandum, May 12, 2021
- e. ED NO. 21-012 (Revised)
- f. ED NO. 21-011 (2nd Revised)
- g. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/infection-control-recommendations.html>
- h. <https://www.cdc.gov/respiratory-viruses/prevention/precautions-when-sick.html>


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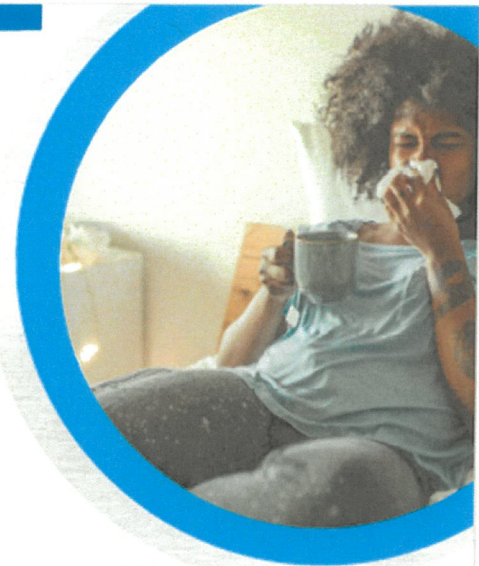
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Appendix 1

Treatment Options for COVID -19

TREATMENT OPTIONS FOR COVID-19

Certain people who have COVID-19 are at greater risk for developing serious illness (e.g., older adults, people who are unvaccinated, people with certain medical conditions, and those with weakened immune systems).*



If you test positive for COVID-19, there are treatments that may be available to you.



Act fast! Treatment must be started within days after you first develop symptoms to be effective.



Free testing and treatment is available at a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) near you. Scan the QR code below or call 2-1-1.



Treatments are not a substitute for COVID-19 vaccines. Make sure you are up to date on all COVID-19 vaccines.



Speak with your health care provider for more information.



For more information, visit the New Jersey COVID-19 Information Hub:
covid19.nj.gov



* cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/treatments-for-severe-illness.html

Appendix 2

Treatment Options for COVID -19

C O N F I D E N T I A L

Date:	
Name:	
COVID-19 Results:	
Nurse:	
Location: (Please circle one)	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;">VHNYCAVHS</div>

You have tested positive for COVID-19. Please follow all protocols in accordance with the CDC and the NJDOH guidance. (**Attachment 1**)

The local Health Department will be notified.

Employees: You must notify the Human Resources Division at 609-530-7032.

You should contact your local Department of Health regarding your test results within the jurisdiction where you reside.

You may obtain information for your Local Health Department by visiting the NJ Department of Health website at <https://www.nj.gov/health/lh/documents/localhealthdirectory.pdf>.

C O N F I D E N T I A L