

Middle Eastern Respiratory Syndrome – Coronavirus (MERS-CoV) Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

1. Does Virginia’s public health laboratory conduct MERS-CoV testing?

Yes. The Division of Consolidated Laboratory Services (DCLS), within the Virginia Department of General Services, has been qualified and approved by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Laboratory Response Network (LRN) to perform real time RT-PCR testing for the detection of MERS-CoV.

2. How does the MERS-CoV test work?

PCR, or Polymerase Chain Reaction, is a molecular analysis technique in which the genetic material of the MERS-CoV virus is amplified or replicated to produce thousands to millions of copies. These amplified copies can be detected by using MERS-CoV specific probes that target specific sequences within the MERS-CoV viral genome, which is detected using specific instrumentation in the laboratory. If MERS-CoV specific amplification occurs, a patient sample is considered presumptive positive for MERS-CoV

3. How long has DCLS performed MERS-CoV testing? How many cases have been tested at DCLS?

DCLS has performed MERS-CoV real time RT-PCR testing since May 2013. Since that time, DCLS has performed testing for 17 cases.

4. Will DCLS perform testing for other respiratory pathogens while testing for MERS-CoV?

Yes. DCLS will perform the CDC’s 7-target Influenza real-time RT-PCR test concurrently with MERS-CoV testing. If specimens test negative for MERS-CoV and Influenza virus, Respiratory Virus Panel (RVP) testing and viral cultures will be performed for the detection of other respiratory viral pathogens.

5. What is the turnaround time for MERS-CoV and Influenza test results?

MERS-CoV and influenza test results can be provided within 4 to 5 hours after specimens have been received at DCLS and sample processing initiated.

6. What is the turnaround time for Respiratory Virus Panel (RVP) testing?

RVP test results are provided within 48 hours after testing has been initiated.

7. Does DCLS perform MERS-CoV testing after normal business hours?

Yes. DCLS can perform emergency MERS-CoV testing outside of normal business hours. The decision to perform emergency after-hours testing will be decided on a case by case basis after consultation with VDH and the treating physicians.

8. Who do I call if there’s a suspect MERS-CoV case at my facility? Who determines if a suspect case warrants testing for MERS-CoV?

Contact your local epidemiologist or VDH immediately to have the case reviewed. VDH has the responsibility of investigating all suspect cases, approving a case for testing and requesting testing at DCLS if a patient fits the case definition for MERS-CoV infection. DCLS will perform MERS-CoV testing upon request by VDH only.

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9. How do I determine my local epidemiologist?

Please use the link below to obtain contact information for your local health department. It is highly recommended that local health department contact information be posted to your laboratory: <http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/LHD>.

10. What specimens should be collected for MERS-CoV testing?

A lower respiratory tract specimen (e.g. sputum, bronchoalveolar lavage (BAL), tracheal aspirate or pleural fluid), an upper respiratory tract specimen (combined NP/OP swab) **AND** blood/serum are the **required** specimens for MERS-CoV testing.

For detailed MERS-CoV specimen collection kit information and instructions, please visit the DCLS website, under the "Hot Topics" section:

<http://www.dgs.state.va.us/DivisionofConsolidatedLaboratoryServices/HotTopics/tabid/1531/Default.aspx>.

11. How can hospital laboratories receive MERS-CoV specimen collection kits?

Contact your local health department/epidemiologist for a MERS-CoV collection kit OR contact DCLS' Sample Kit Office at 804-648-4480, ext. 104 to request kits.

12. How do hospital laboratories submit specimens to DCLS for MERS-CoV testing?

Once a suspect case has been investigated and approved for testing by the Virginia Department of Health, specimens can be sent via regular courier pick-up or via FedEx. For emergency testing, DCLS will arrange for a special courier pick-up. The specimens will be delivered to DCLS immediately.

13. What forms should be completed when submitting samples for testing?

Please complete the DCLS Micro Viro test request form. Please ensure complete patient and submitter information, and type of testing requested are provided on the form.

14. How are the results for the MERS-CoV real time RT-PCR assay interpreted? What follow-up actions are needed?

Negative test results for the detection of MERS-CoV are considered **final test results**.

Positive test results are considered **presumptive positive** for MERS-CoV. Confirmatory testing will be performed at CDC.

15. Who facilitates sending additional specimens to CDC for confirmatory testing?

DCLS has the responsibility of forwarding presumptive positive specimens to CDC for confirmation.

ALL QUESTIONS AND INQUIRIES REGARDING LABORATORY TESTING SHOULD BE DIRECTED TO THE DCLS CONTACTS LISTED BELOW

DCLS Emergency Mobile 24/7 Number: 804-335-4617

Or

DCLS BT Response Coordinator, Dr. LaToya Griffin-Thomas: 804-385-8057