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Guidelines

Real-Time Polymerase Chain Reaction (RT-PCR) Diagnostic Test

Objective

To provide public health and health care professionals the guidelines regarding the priorities recommended for the purpose of diagnostic testing for COVID 19.

Rationale

The current prevalence of the COVID-19 disease in Pakistan is quantified by positive test results and reported at national and international level. The Ministry of National Health Services, Regulations & Coordination (NHSR&C) encourages everyone to adhere to the National Testing guidance.

As such a number of COVID-19 tests are available in Pakistan. However, so far, the most reliable test/assay is Real-time Polymerase Chain Reaction (RT-PCR) for the detection of SARS-CoV-19 infection.

Given the dynamics of the COVID-19, it is not advisable to use PCR based testing for screening purposes, as it may increase the false positive results in normal individuals. It is therefore important that public health and health care professionals prioritize testing for COVID-19, while following the provided guidelines.

Priorities for the RT-PCR Testing

Priority one:

- Critically ill patients requiring hospitalization with unexplained symptoms;
- Individuals with respiratory symptoms and contact with positive COVID-19 patient or recent travel to areas with community transmission;
- Patients with fever or lower respiratory infections requiring hospitalization who also are immune-compromised (including those with HIV), elderly or have underlying chronic conditions;
- Individuals critical to the pandemic response who experience respiratory symptoms, such as health care workers and public health officials.



Priority two:

- Patients in outpatient settings who meet the updated COVID-19 case definition, including those with select co-morbid conditions like diabetes, COPD, congestive heart failure; pregnant women; and symptomatic children with additional risk factors.

Priority Three:

- Individuals in communities being monitored by public health authorities, such as quarantine facilities, contact tracing, research or other purposes.

Note: The above recommendations are being regularly reviewed by the Ministry of National Health Services, Regulations & Coordination and will be updated based on the international recommendations and best practices.

The Ministry acknowledges the contribution of Dr. M. Salman Janjua and HSA/ HPSIU/ NIH team to compile these guidelines.

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