Recommendations for COVID-19 Testing

The current prevalence of COVID-19 disease in Pakistan, as quantified by positive test results, remains low. The NIH, Ministry of NHSRC encourages everyone to adhere to national testing guidance. As such a number of COVID-19 tests are available in Pakistan. However, the most reliable test/assay is Real-time RT-PCR for the detection of SARS-CoV-19. 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. Following priorities are recommended for the purpose of testing in Pakistan.

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 National Diagnostic Group and will be updated based on the international recommendations and best practices.