



2 July 2020

TO: Fire Management Board Members
FROM: Leon Ben Jr., Chair, Fire Management Board
SUBJECT: Updated guidance on Laboratory Testing for Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19)

The purpose of this memo is to release updated guidance on laboratory testing for Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) of Wildland Fire Management Personnel and recommendations for payment of COVID-19 tests.

The COVID-19 Wildland Fire Medical and Public Health Advisory Team (MPHAT) released the attached Memorandum for Record for wildland fire management personnel to the Fire Management Board (FMB) on June 14, 2020. This memo follows Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance on laboratory testing for COVID-19. Wildland fire personnel should continue to follow guidance from MPHAT and local medical and public health and safety professionals. When COVID-19 is known/suspected in the workplace or on an incident, managers should engage with those professionals on the best course of action for that local situation.

Workers who are symptomatic upon arrival at work, or who become sick during the day, should immediately be separated from others and sent to a health care facility to be evaluated and tested. Co-workers may be identified as close contacts through case investigation and contact tracing which will evaluate the proximity and length of contact with the individual with COVID-19. Co-workers on the same “module as one”, or those working the same or overlapping shifts in the same area may be identified as a close contact based on an employer’s assessment of the risk in the workplace. Contact tracing is the responsibility of State Health Organizations; the individual’s home unit and incident personnel can provide support to this effort.

Testing practices should aim for rapid turnaround times in order to facilitate effective action. Testing at different points in time, also referred to as serial testing, may be more likely to detect acute infection among workers with repeat exposures than testing done at a single point in time.

With symptomatic or asymptomatic close contact employees, rapid Viral (nucleic acid or antigen) testing is recommended; the cost of this testing is covered by the government. This approach is in the best interest of both the employee and the government.

For COVID-19 testing to be effectively implemented, options for payment must be straightforward and supported by responsible incident and agency personnel. To achieve this goal, the FMB developed these recommendations to assist responsible incident management and agency employees:

- Employees should engage in daily self-screening to monitor condition, and employers will promote a reporting culture, where potential COVID-19 can be identified quickly and without adverse consequence.

- Testing should be focused on symptomatic and CDC Tier 1 exposure employees^a. Payment is the responsibility of the government when employees are advised to test by incident or agency medical/public health professionals or they meet agency specific testing criteria:
 - Testing of employees on wildfire incidents may be paid with purchase card under Agency Provided Medical Care (APMC) process or through other mechanism established by the incident.
 - Payment for testing of wildland fire employees at the home unit is the responsibility of the home unit; consult agency specific guidance and payment procedures.
 - Reasonable efforts should be made to utilize FDA approved testing.
- Wildland fire responders receiving a positive test result should adhere to Public Health recommendations and may be eligible for alternative housing arrangements paid for by the agency for up to two weeks.

Employees on an incident assignment, who are isolated while awaiting test results, will be guaranteed base hours per agency specific guidelines. FMB memoranda are available on the [website](#). This is an unprecedented time and we continue to work diligently with our interagency, state, and local partners to meet these challenges while responding to wildfires.

Attachment

Distribution:

- Fire Management Board Members
- Fire Executive Council Members
- National Multi-Agency Coordinating Group Members
- National Wildfire Coordinating Group Members
- COVID-19 Coordinators

^a CDC Critical Infrastructure Tier 1

- Coworkers identified as close contacts through case investigation and contact tracing evaluating proximity and length of contact of co-workers with the individual with COVID-19
- Coworkers who work during the same shift or overlapping shifts, in the same area, for example on the same line and same room, as one or more of the workers with COVID19 based on the employer’s assessment of risk in the workplace