Update for local medical practices

Mesa County Public Health is, out of necessity and in alignment with CDC guidance, prioritizing testing for the COVID 19 virus to individuals at high risk of serious disease and health care providers. When referring patients for a COVID 19 test it would be most helpful if you pre-select patients that meet the following criteria:

1. At least one of the key symptoms of fever, cough and/or shortness of breath (we are not including sore throat, runny nose, nausea or diarrhea as criteria for testing)

As well as one or more of the following:

1. Age 60 years or older
2. An underlying medical condition associated with risk of serious disease from COVID 19 (diabetes, heart, lung or kidney disease, severe hypertension, condition or treatments associated with immune suppression or compromise)
3. Exposure to an individual with known COVID 19 infection
4. A health care worker

If the patient has at least one of the key symptoms and one additional factor, you can refer them for testing by faxing a referral to Mesa County Public Health at **970-683-6654**

Please let patients know that it can require a day or two for an open spot on the schedule. Currently, the test is sent to Denver to be processed and it is taking longer than expected to get the test results back (we had anticipated 3 to 5 days, but it is exceeding that time frame at this point). A soon as the results are available, the patient will be notified of their results either way, if the test is positive or negative for COVID 19. Your practice will need to check with the patient to receive the COVID 19 test results.

It is important to emphasize to the patient that “testing is not treatment”. While waiting to be tested and for the results of the test, the patient needs to remain under home isolation (not going out in public except for medical care) and monitor their symptoms. They need to separate from other people and from any pets in the home, avoid sharing household items and do frequent cleansing of their hands and “high touch” surfaces.

* If the test is negative, they still need to stay home and away from others until they are symptom free for 24 hours. They will still need to do the social distancing (at least 6 feet from other people) and frequent cleansing of their hands and “high touch” surfaces to avoid contracting COVID 19.
* If the test is positive, they need to continue the home isolation and actions to protect others. They need to be reminded that there is no treatment for COVID 19, only management of symptoms with acetaminophen, cough suppressants, hydration and rest. If shortness of breath worsens, they should, depending on severity of symptoms, either call your office or the ED before coming in and indicate they are COVID 19 positive. They need to remain in isolation until the symptoms are resolved and they have been symptom-free without treatment for at least 72 hours.

It is also important to emphasize that just because a patient is not high priority for a COVID 19 test, they likely have COVD 19 or at least have another type of infection and they need to follow the same guidelines as above, including home isolation, protecting others from exposure and not going into public until symptom-free for 72 hours. In addition, once recovered, they should continue to practice the precautions of social distancing and frequent cleansing of their hands and “high touch” surfaces.

The Mesa County Public Health hotline number is 970-683-2300