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RIGHT TEST FOR THE RIGHT REASON: UPDATES ON NEW TESTING TECHNOLOGIES FOR COVID-19

Press Release | 5 January 2021

On the Use of Saliva as Alternative Specimen for COVID-19 Testing

Currently, Nasopharyngeal (NPS) and Oropharyngeal swab (OPS) are the recommended modes of specimen collection for the detection of Severe Acute Respiratory Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). However, recently there has been growing evidence on the potential of saliva as an alternative specimen for COVID-19 testing.

The Department of Health (DOH) recognizes the potential use of saliva as a specimen for SARS-CoV-2 detection through RT-PCR. Hence, to be able to establish its effectiveness supported by local evidence, there are two (2) ongoing local studies on its use as an alternative specimen for COVID-19 testing led by the Research Institute for Tropical Medicine (RITM) and the other by Philippine Red Cross (PRC). To date, RITM has yet to conclude its study while PRC has yet to consider the recommendations of the DOH and COVID-19 Laboratory Expert Panel (CLEP) based on its initial results.

Upon completion of both studies, results shall be assessed by the CLEP and the Health Technology Assessment Council whose recommendations will help the DOH develop an evidence-based policy on the use of saliva as alternative specimen for COVID-19 testing.

On the Use of Pooled Testing

The Department of Health also recognizes specimen pooling strategies as an opportunity for greater COVID-19 testing efficiency by reducing turnaround time and saving on supplies.

In line with this, the DOH issued Department Memorandum 2020-0539 providing interim guidelines on the conduct of COVID-19 pooled testing based on the pooling protocols set by the Philippine Society of Pathologists, Inc., RITM, and DOH.

Rest assured, the Department of Health will continue to support the conduct of studies and innovations that will help mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in our country.

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