



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Department of Health
P O BOX 2448
RICHMOND, VA 23218

M. Norman Oliver, MD, MA
State Health Commissioner

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1-800-828-1120

July 28, 2021

Dear Clinical Laboratory Partner:

As we continue to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic, the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) is calling upon Virginia hospitals to assist with Virginia's efforts to enhance genetic sequence surveillance for SARS-CoV-2 variants of concern. Because of increasing concerns related to the Delta (B.1.617.2) variant and other potential variants of concern, VDH and the Division of Consolidated Laboratory Services (DCLS) intend to increase the number of sequenced samples to allow for early identification of variants circulating throughout the Commonwealth.

The Delta variant was first identified in Virginia in March 2021. This variant spreads more easily and quickly than other variants. The transmissibility rate is thought to be about 40-60% greater than the Alpha (B.1.1.7) variant. According to new estimates released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on July 6, 2021, the Delta variant became the most commonly sequenced SARS-CoV-2 variant in the United States during the weeks of June 20–July 3, 2021. As a result, VDH needs to enhance and expand sequencing surveillance to ensure prompt public health mitigation efforts.

DCLS and VDH have a goal of sequencing 1000–1400 specimens per week to ensure adequate data to identify existing variants of concern and new variants as they emerge in Virginia, and to understand how they are spreading through the Commonwealth. To meet this goal, we are requesting Virginia hospitals send a minimum of 50% of the positive specimens possessing a cycle threshold (Ct) value less than 30 each week to DCLS or a designated regional VAS3 laboratory partner.*¹ Please see the attached document outlining the specifications for submitting specimens for sequencing effective immediately.

As a reminder, pursuant to [12VAC5-90-90 subsection B](#), VDH is authorized to request that laboratories submit the initial isolate or other initial specimen to DCLS within seven

¹ *Regional VAS3 laboratory partners include the University of Virginia Medical Center, Virginia Tech Fralin Research Center and Virginia Commonwealth University.

Clinical Laboratory Partner

July 28, 2021

Page 2

days of identification of COVID-19. All specimens must be identified with the patient (name and date of birth) and physician information required in this subsection of the regulation.

On behalf of VDH, I thank you for your tireless efforts and sacrifices these many months to protect Virginians from COVID-19. If you have questions about this effort, please contact dcls_ngsrequest@dgs.virginia.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "M. Norman Oliver MD". The signature is written in a cursive style with a distinct "M" and "O".

M. Norman Oliver, MD, MA
State Health Commissioner