Republic of the Philippines
Department of Health
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

July 8, 2020

DEPARTMENT MEMORANDUM
No. 2020- 0324

TO : **ALL REGIONAL DIRECTORS, HEADS OF HOSPITALS AND OTHER HEALTH FACILITIES, CHIEFS OF THE HEALTH FACILITIES AND SERVICES REGULATORY BUREAU AND THE CENTERS FOR HEALTH DEVELOPMENT – REGULATION, LICENSING AND ENFORCEMENT DIVISION, MINISTRY OF HEALTH OF THE BANGSAMORO AUTONOMOUS REGION IN MUSLIM MINDANAO (MOH-BARMM), REGULATORY OFFICERS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS CONCERNED**

SUBJECT : **Mandatory Notification of Remote Collection Activity of COVID-19 Testing Laboratories**

The current COVID-19 pandemic created an increase in the demand for more diagnostic tests using Real-Time Reverse Transciptase Polymerase Chain Reaction (rRT-PCR), the gold standard for the detection of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). Different strategies are being considered to respond to the need to make the testing more accessible. This resulted in conducting mobile or remote collections and establishing specific swabbing centers, thus easing the congestion and bringing the testing facilities closer to the people.

However, accessible testing has to be balanced with generation of quality results. An essential step in every laboratory test is the pre-analytical procedure, which includes collection, handling, and transport of specimens. Since live viruses are being handled, biosafety and biosecurity protocols are of utmost concern to prevent further spread of the disease.

In view of the above, the following guidelines in the conduct of remote collection of COVID-19 testing laboratories shall strictly be followed:

1. Only DOH licensed COVID-19 testing laboratories, performing PCR in the detection of SARS-CoV-2, whether rRT-PCR or Cartridge-based PCR, shall be allowed to conduct remote collection of specimen.
2. All DOH licensed COVID-19 testing laboratories, which will conduct remote collection testing shall adhere to the specimen collection protocol stated in the Department Circular (D.C.) No. 2020-0204, dated May 8, 2020, titled " Advisory on Specimen Collection of Nasopharyngeal and Oropharyngeal Swabs in Swabbing Centers"

3. COVID-19 testing laboratories shall notify DOH-HFSRB three (3) days prior to the proposed schedule of the remote collection activity.
4. Notification letter may be submitted through any of the following modes: postal mail, e-mail, via courier service, or walk-in submission.
5. A copy of official notification letter (with stamped received by DOH-HFSRB) shall be available on-site during the remote collection activity.
6. The HFSRB or CHD-RLED may monitor the conduct of remote collection activity.
7. Adherence to the standards and requirements set forth in Administrative Order (AO) No. 2020-0014 titled "Guidelines in Securing a License to Operate a COVID-19 Testing Laboratory in the Philippines", its Amendment and the Assessment Tool for Licensing a COVID-19 Testing Laboratory, Department Memorandum No. 2020-0268, dated May 28. 2020, titled "Interim Guidelines on Health Facilities in the New Normal", and D.C. No. 2020-0227, dated May 26, 2020, titled "Additional Requirement in the Licensing of a COVID-19 Testing Laboratory" shall strictly be enforced.

Failure to notify DOH-HFSRB of the proposed remote collection activity shall merit the appropriate sanction.

For strict implementation.

FRANCISCO T. DUQUE III, MD, MSc
Secretary of Health

CERTIFIED TRUE COPY
OCT 09 2020
CORAZON G. DELA CRUZ
RMTC - RECORDS SECTION
Department of Health