Coronavirus Testing Recommendations

Albany, Ga. – Following the first Georgia death due to COVID-19, Phoebe continues to follow CDC guidelines regarding coronavirus testing and treatment. Most COVID-19 patients have developed a fever and/or symptoms of acute respiratory illness such as cough and difficulty breathing, though symptoms are usually mild and do not require hospitalization. Older individuals, those with chronic conditions and those with compromised immune systems are at greater risk of serious complications.

“Any patient who is in respiratory distress or is truly having a medical emergency should certainly call 911 or go to an emergency room right away, but people with mild coronavirus symptoms or no symptoms at all should not show up at an ER to request a coronavirus test,” said James Black, MD, Phoebe Medical Director of Emergency Services.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) does not recommend COVID-19 testing for all patients exhibiting symptoms. The CDC says priorities for testing may include:

- Hospitalized patients who have signs and symptoms compatible with COVID-19 in order to inform decisions related to infection control.
- Other symptomatic individuals who are at higher risk for poor outcomes.
- Any person who had close contact with a suspected or confirmed COVID-19 patient, or who have a history of travel from affected geographic areas within 14 days of their symptom onset.
According to the CDC, “mildly ill patients should be encouraged to stay home and contact their healthcare provider by phone for guidance about clinical management. Patients who have severe symptoms, such as difficulty breathing, should seek care immediately. Older patients and individuals who have underlying medical conditions or are immunocompromised should contact their physician early in the course of even mild illness.”

Current COVID-19 screening recommendations based on that CDC guidance include:

- Older individuals and those with chronic conditions should be tested as soon as they develop symptoms.
- Younger, generally healthy people should self-isolate and contact a clinician if mild symptoms develop.
- Anyone in respiratory distress or having a true medical emergency should call 911 or go to an ER immediately.
- People with mild or no symptoms should not show up at an ER to request a COVID-19 test.

Limited COVID-19 specimen collection kits are available at Phoebe hospitals, primary care clinics, urgent care clinics and the community care clinic. Testing must be ordered by a physician and is performed through the Georgia Department of Public Health Lab or a commercial lab. Generally, results are available as soon as 48 hours after processing.

It is recommended all patients exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms call ahead before visiting any healthcare facility. Get updated coronavirus information at phoebehealth.com/coronavirus and cdc.gov.

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