Ministry of Health
Vanuatu Government

COVID-19 Public Health Information Sheet
Pre-Travel Exit Testing for COVID-19 in Vanuatu

Version 2, September 2021

Key Information:

- Some countries or airlines require evidence of a negative COVID-19 test prior to be given approval to enter the country or board a flight.
- Sampling and testing for the purpose of travel can be arranged via Vila Central Hospital for a fee of 25,000 vatu per person. Some private clinics may also take samples for this purpose which are sent to VCH for testing.
- Results usually take 24 – 48 hours but this can differ.
- Travelers are advised to organize their tests in advance by contacting: Vila Central Hospital National Reference Laboratory at jgpakoa@vanuatu.gov.vu or the Surveillance Unit at wwilliams@vanuatu.gov.vu with a copy to nheoc@vanuatu.gov.vu

Background

SARS-CoV-2 is the virus that causes COVID-19 disease. Evidence of a negative SARS-CoV-2 laboratory test (usually using a method called RT-PCR) is required by some countries prior to entry, and by some airlines prior to boarding. Vila Central Hospital has received requests for pre-travel tests as the National Reference Laboratory of the Vanuatu Ministry of Health with testing capacity for SARS-CoV-2.

Key questions and answers are provided below to summarise the testing process for SARS-CoV-2 tests in Vanuatu.

Who can get tested for SARS-CoV-2 in Vanuatu?

Testing is usually for those people who exhibit COVID-19 symptoms and fit the case definition for a suspected COVID-19 case or for people arriving from overseas who are in government-mandated quarantine. However, due to demand the Ministry of Health currently performs pre-travel tests for people travelling out of Vanuatu for a cost. This testing is conducted upon request and is contingent on available sampling and testing supplies and staff.

How much does sampling and testing cost?

The fee is 25,000 vatu for sampling and testing if required pre-travel. This fee must be provided to the Vila Central Hospital Cashier before a sample will be taken. This covers the costs of the process and typical replacement costs for supplies. Private clinics identified by the MOH to have the capacity and technical expertise may also provide a sampling service but samples will be sent to VCH for testing.

Where and when can I get a sample taken for testing? Do I need to book in advance?

Samples can be taken during open hours of Vila Central Hospital, which are usually from 8am to 5pm on Monday to Friday. No booking is necessary but there may be a waiting

period for sampling. Private clinics should be contacted to determine their availability for sampling (with samples then sent to VCH for testing).

There is no sampling or testing facility at Bauerfield Airport so sampling and tests must be done in advance of flights, allowing 24-48 hours for processing.

How is the sample obtained for testing?

Samples are taken using a nasopharyngeal swab. This involves inserting a long cotton-tipped bud into the nasal passage. This can cause some minor and temporary discomfort.

What type of test is performed?

The standard test performed for SARS-CoV-2 is a reverse transcriptase polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR) to detect virus. The testing platform currently used at Vila Central Hospital is the GeneXpert, Cepheid®.

How long will it take to get results?

Sampling should usually be conducted **between 48 and 72 hours prior to the outbound flight** to ensure that results can be received in time. Results are normally available within 24-48 hours after the sample is taken but this time can differ depending on the number of other samples that also require testing by the laboratory.

How are the results provided?

Test results for those people intending to travel out of Vanuatu are sent via email or can be picked up from Vila Central Hospital when ready.

What happens if my test result is positive?

In the event that a positive test result is received, and you are considered to have COVID-19, you will be admitted to an isolation ward and receive appropriate medical care. It is unlikely you will be permitted to travel.

For further information, contact Vila Central Hospital National Reference Laboratory at jgpakoa@vanuatu.gov.vu or the Surveillance Unit at wwilliams@vanuatu.gov.vu with a copy to nheoc@vanuatu.gov.vu.