

## **Preparing for the Possibility of SARS**

*by Tony Sambol, Assistant Director, NPHL*

The Nebraska Public Health Laboratory (NPHL) has received inquiries regarding the handling, transportation and diagnostic testing of clinical (human) specimens for the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) associated Coronavirus, also known as SARS-CoV.

The NPHL has worked closely with Dr. Anne Mardis and Dr. Thomas Safranek, State Medical Epidemiologists at the Nebraska Health and Human Services System (NHHSS), in the formulation and coordination of a state response plan. A portion of the response plan will entail a laboratory testing strategy or algorithm for NHHSS approved testing. The response plan will be based on guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists (CSTE), and the Association of Public Health Laboratories (APHL). These organizations have put together guidance documentation outlining “alertness levels” for healthcare providers based on international, national, state and local SARS activity. These guidelines are being utilized by the state public health laboratories and state epidemiologists to formulate state-specific SARS response plans. On November 25, 2003, Richard Raymond, M.D., Nebraska’s Chief Medical Officer sent out, through the Nebraska Health Alert Network, details regarding SARS surveillance, case reporting and laboratory testing. Please go to the homepage of [www.nphl.org](http://www.nphl.org) to view this document.

As part of CDC's Laboratory Response Network (LRN), the NPHL has ability to test respiratory specimens for the presence of SARS-CoV by DNA PCR testing. Additionally, the NPHL can perform SARS-CoV IgM and IgG antibody testing. All specimens should be collected using the recommended Standard Precautions (previously Universal Precautions), and handled in Biosafety Level 2 (BSL-2) laboratory conditions. Additional information about SARS can be found at the CDC’s website ([www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars/](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars/)).

Prior to collecting or ordering SARS testing, all suspect cases must be approved for SARS-CoV testing by NHHSS officials. Once the approval for SARS testing has been granted, specimens should be properly collected and sent to the NPHL for testing. All potential SARS related cases should be discussed with Dr. Anne Mardis or Dr. Tom Safranek by calling 402-471-2937.

If SARS testing is approved by an NHHSS official, transportation methods other than the usual means may be used to expedite shipment of the specimen. Please contact NPHL Client Services with packaging and shipping questions. For laboratory questions, please contact Tony Sambol at 402-559-3032.