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Wolf Administration Provides Testing and Contact Tracing Update

Harrisburg, Pa. – Today, Michael Huff, Director of Testing and Contact Tracing for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, presented an update on the commonwealth’s COVID-19 testing and contact tracing efforts, including Pennsylvania’s plans to distribute more than 3.8 million Abbott BinaxNOW antigen rapid tests allocated to the state by the federal government.

These tests, which have been arriving in weekly allotments since October and will continue through the end of December, are being used to test and protect vulnerable populations in Pennsylvania counties demonstrating substantial risk for community spread, prioritizing counties with current outbreaks.

“It is a top priority to ensure that all people in Pennsylvania who need a test will have access to one,” Huff said. “We will continue to closely monitor the number of cases in communities across the commonwealth to ensure that testing sites are situated appropriately in areas with the greatest need.”

Pennsylvania’s testing goals are to ensure testing is accessible, available and adaptable to changing community needs. To achieve this, the commonwealth utilizes existing public health infrastructure to implement the COVID-19 prioritized, tiered approach to comprehensive testing throughout Pennsylvania. This public health network covers the entire commonwealth with over 550 contracted sites and over 400 public health sites. As more testing sites become available, they will be added to the commonwealth’s [map of testing sites](#).

As cases of COVID-19 continue to increase in Pennsylvania, it is essential that Pennsylvanians follow mitigation guidelines and take steps to keep themselves and their families safe, including wearing masks, washing hands regularly and staying home if you feel sick.

Pennsylvania [recently put several mitigation efforts in place](#) to stop the spread of COVID-19, including expanding the Secretary of Health’s universal masking order to require mask-wearing both indoors and outdoors if you are with people other than members of your own household. With the exception of daily commuters traveling for work, Pennsylvania also requires anyone entering the commonwealth – including Pennsylvanians returning from travel – to receive a negative COVID-19 test within 72 hours prior to entering the commonwealth or to quarantine for 14 days upon arrival in Pennsylvania.

“To stop community spread of this virus, Pennsylvanians must comply with mitigation requirements, especially mask-wearing guidelines and travel restrictions,” Huff said. “Our individual actions and decisions will determine the course of this pandemic. And if you do contract the virus, you must follow quarantine guidelines and work with contact tracers. Time is of the essence.”

Identifying contacts of COVID-19 patients and ensuring they do not interact with others is critical to protecting communities from further spread. If communities are unable to effectively isolate patients and ensure contacts can separate themselves from others, rapid community spread of COVID-19 is likely to increase.

Pennsylvania has more than 1600 contact tracers and 150 stakeholder groups who assist with identifying and interviewing people with COVID-19, as well as providing information and support to the contacts of COVID-19 patients.

Currently the commonwealth is prioritizing case investigations to ensure those who are most vulnerable or could lead to greater community spread or outbreaks receive a case investigation first. This prioritization is vital during the current surge in cases. People are urged to answer the call from a case reviewer and to provide as much information as possible. Case reviewers are trained public health professionals with specialized skills and a thorough understanding of the need for patient confidentiality.

Pennsylvania is uniting against COVID. Here are the mitigation measures in place to keep people safe:

Business, Work, School, Child Care, and Congregate Settings

- Child care may open, complying with guidance
- Congregate care restrictions in place
- Prison and hospital restrictions determined by individual facilities
- Schools subject to [CDC](#) and commonwealth guidance
- Telework must continue where feasible
- Businesses with in-person operations must follow updated [business and building safety requirements](#)
- Masks are required in businesses
- All in-person businesses may operate at 75% occupancy, except where noted
 - Self-certified restaurants may open at 50% capacity for indoor dining
 - On-premises alcohol consumption prohibited unless part of a meal; cocktails-to-go and carryout beverages are allowed
 - Serving alcohol for on-site consumption must end at 11 p.m, and all alcoholic beverages must be removed from patrons by midnight
 - Personal care services (including hair salons and barbershops) open at 50% occupancy and by appointment only
 - Indoor recreation and health and wellness facilities (such as gyms and spas) open at 50% occupancy with appointments strongly encouraged; fitness facilities are directed to prioritize outdoor fitness activities
 - All entertainment (such as casinos, theaters, and shopping malls) open at 50% occupancy
- Construction activity may return to full capacity with continued implementation of protocol

Social Restrictions

- Gathering limits determined using [maximum occupancy calculator](#)
- Masks are required in all public spaces

The Wolf Administration supports local officials who choose to maintain additional restrictions. Currently [Philadelphia](#) has additional local restrictions. Find more information on COVID-19 in Pennsylvania [here](#).

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