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Wolf Administration Provides 2020 Testing and Contact Tracing Update, Reinforces the Importance of Testing, Supports for Those Contacted

Harrisburg, PA – Wolf Administration Director of Testing and Contact Tracing, Michael Huff, and Special Assistant on Contact Tracing for the Department of Health, Lindsey Mauldin, today presented an update on the state's COVID-19 testing and contact tracing efforts, emphasizing the need for continued testing as Pennsylvania begins vaccine rollout.

“To date over 8.3 million test results have been received in Pennsylvania,” Huff said. “Our COVID-19 testing provider, AMI, continues to offer regional testing in five counties each week. Last week, the regional sites tested approximately 4,000 individuals. This week, sites are in Crawford, Dauphin, Lehigh, Somerset and Union counties, and will conclude on Friday.”

Testing sites are open from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. All tests are free and are on a first-come, first-served basis.

Mauldin provided an update on the progress made in 2020 and what the department learned regarding the needs of those individuals reached by case investigators and contact tracers.

In 2020, the department hired more than 1,000 contact tracers and promoted some tracers to case investigators; they built workflows and best practices to move forward in 2021.

By talking with individuals during the tracing process, contact tracers learned that there were needs to support individuals facing hardships with quarantine, things such as supports for food security, housing or even for those facing mental health or substance use disorder needs.

“We are fortunate to have 10 social support coordinators in the commonwealth today,” Mauldin said. “Expanding our contact tracing program and building a public health infrastructure to support the needs of COVID-19 cases could not have been done without federal funding support from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

“Through this federal funding, we have worked to build our public health infrastructure. We hope that as we move into this new year, there is additional funding available to support these ongoing efforts to keep Pennsylvanians safe and healthy.”

The Department of Health [unveiled a digital case investigation tool](#), called Connect & Protect, on Dec. 21, and data on its initial use is still being collected. With the tool, Pennsylvanians 19 through 64 who reside in a county without its own county or municipal health department receive a call from a public health professional and are asked to provide their email address to receive the Connect & Protect Form to complete as soon as possible.

The tool enables public health professionals to reach out to more Pennsylvanians, cutting down the time it would typically take to complete a case investigation.

In addition to the Connect & Protect tool, the administration continues to prioritize case investigations to reach those most vulnerable.

Huff also discussed how the administration's testing plan includes more surveillance testing to identify and mitigate asymptomatic cases in the community. Surveillance testing involves providing easy access to testing for communities, especially those populations who are vulnerable or at higher risk, to increase safety and decrease exposures from both symptomatic and asymptomatic individuals. With estimates of up to 40 percent of COVID-19 positive tests among asymptomatic individuals, surveillance testing is a vital component of the state's testing plan.

"Our approach to COVID-19 testing reflects the current reality and our commitment to keeping our community safe," Huff said. "Even though the hope is that there will be a COVID-19 vaccine available for most people sometime in this new year, the vaccine does not override the importance of continuing to test for the virus and contain it to stop the spread."

Learn more about testing and find a map of COVID-19 testing sites [here](#).

MEDIA CONTACT: Lyndsay Kensinger, RA-GVGOVPRESS@pa.gov

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