NEWS RELEASE

Contact: Communications Office
EOC Public Information Officer
communications@wakegov.com, 919-856-7036
Communications Office After Hours, 919-857-WAKE
wakegov.com/news

For Release: March 16, 2020

Wake County Provides Guidance to Healthcare Providers, Public about COVID-19 Testing

The Wake County Public Health Division is working with its local healthcare providers to ensure they have and understand COVID-19 testing guidance. Our public health team has sent them written guidance that outlines the testing criteria.

"This type of collaboration is critically important, because we can't do this alone," said Wake County Medical Director Dr. Kim McDonald. "Our partners play a key role in diagnosing people who have COVID-19, so we can isolate them and protect others from contracting coronavirus."

How Testing Works
There are currently two paths for COVID-19 testing.

Path #1: The Wake County Public Health Division will only test contacts of COVID-19 positive individuals and people who have been identified through the federal government's screening at airports as having traveled to a high-risk area. Primary healthcare providers should not refer patients to the health department for testing.

Path #2: A person has symptoms and contacts their primary healthcare provider or an urgent care center. Only seriously ill people who need hospitalization should be referred to a hospital for coronavirus testing.

Following Path #1

Once a person is identified as coming into close contact with someone who is positive for COVID-19 or as having traveled to a high-risk area, our public health team calls them and assesses their symptoms over the phone, using a set list of questions. Based on their responses, our team determines what the appropriate next steps include.

Following Path #2

If a patient is exhibiting symptoms such as fever, cough and shortness of breath and there is a clinical suspicion of COVID-19 infection, the healthcare provider should test the patient for flu.

- If the flu test results are positive, they do not need to be tested for COVID-19.

- If the flu test results are negative and the healthcare provider suspects COVID-19, the doctor should recommend the patient get tested for the coronavirus. The patient should self-quarantine at home until receiving the results.

The patient should then be tested for COVID-19 by the healthcare provider at their facility. However, some urgent care centers or primary care providers may not be testing for COVID-19.

A patient who is tested for coronavirus in the private sector will have their samples sent to LabCorp for processing.

- If the results are positive, Wake County public health staff will contact the patient, inform them of the results, place them in isolation and gather information on their movements before and after becoming symptomatic to gauge their risk of transmitting

the disease to others. The person will not be let out of isolation until they test negative for COVID-19 twice, but the tests must be conducted more than 24 hours apart.

- If the results are negative, the patient may be released from quarantine and can follow up as needed for additional care.

Testing by the Numbers

Providing an accurate number of tests taken at any given time is very difficult, because there are two entities – the state lab and LabCorp – processing the samples.

The county doesn't have access to the numbers of tests LabCorp is processing each day. The county only has information on the samples its public health team sends to the state lab each day for processing and how many results it received each day from the state lab.

"We understand that the public wants to know what our testing picture looks like," said Dr. McDonald. "Although it's challenging to provide accurate point-in-time figures for the number of tests in process and the number of tests completed daily, we're committed to sharing the best information available to us to help our residents better understand our COVID-19 response."

As of March 16 at 3 p.m., Wake County Public Health has submitted 65 tests for coronavirus, and has received 44 back. Of those, 15 were positive and 29 were negative for COVID-19. The county is still waiting on the results of 21 tests.

Media should contact LabCorp for similar numbers from private sector tests. Public health staff experience a two-day delay in getting those figures.

Regarding testing capacity, based on supplies from the state and the private sector, the county currently has enough kits to test anyone deemed at risk of exposure to COVID-19.

Staying Updated
Wake County has made it easy for you to stay updated on the latest information about COVID-19.

You can visit the county's bilingual COVID-19 webpage, which has a set of frequently asked questions to help educate residents in English and Spanish. You can also email us questions at covid19.questions@wakegov.com, or call our COVID-19 information line at 919-856-7044. The county is sharing important information on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services are also good resources for up-to-date, accurate information about this evolving situation.

wakegov.com | @wakegov