

Major testing increase to bolster state's COVID-19 containment strategy

Tuesday, the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) announced a major expansion of testing for COVID-19 in Oregon that will strengthen the state's strategy to suppress the virus.

Starting this week, Oregon will receive between 60,000 and 80,000 Abbott BinaxNOW rapid point-of-care antigen tests per week through the end of December.

Oregon will receive the new tests as a result of a time-limited supply of testing capacity federal officials have allocated to states.

The new additional rapid antigen tests will nearly double Oregon's testing capacity, which will help physicians and health officials identify more people who are infected with COVID-19 and — over

time — reduce transmission, prevent new cases (and hospitalizations) and sustain the state's reopening.

OHA also broadened its testing guidelines to supplement the added testing capacity. The new guidelines recommend testing for anyone who has symptoms of COVID-19 regardless of the severity of those symptoms, along with testing of all close contacts of those individuals, regardless of whether they shown symptoms.

The tests yield quick results, in as little as 15 minutes. But there are limitations. The rapid antigen tests must be administered by a trained professional or at a location that meets certain federal standards for laboratory testing.

As in other forms of COVID-19 testing, posi-

tive results are considered reliable. However, false negative tests are common, even among asymptomatic individuals.

Health officials cautioned that people who test negative under any form of COVID-19 test should continue to exercise caution and practice personal actions to prevent transmission. OHA public health physician Melissa Sutton, M.D., said, "Even if you have a negative test, it's important to wear a mask, stay physically distant from other people (especially older people or those with underlying medical conditions), avoid large gatherings and wash your hands thoroughly."

State health officials said the new tests will bolster a strategy that has kept Oregon's COVID-19

case rates low compared to other states.

Along with testing, Oregon's strategy has relied on guidance that has emphasized face coverings and physical distancing, as well as robust case investigation and contact tracing, isolation and quarantine, and targeted interventions in hotspot counties and for vulnerable populations.

Since May, state and local health officials have more than doubled the number of contact tracers in Oregon — this week there are more than 1,290 contact tracers and case investigators working to contain the spread of COVID-19.

The first 15,000 BinaxNOW tests were deployed to counties and long-term care facilities affected by recent wildfires.

In addition, OHA will prioritize testing for communities hardest hit by COVID-19:

- Migrant and seasonal farmworkers.
- Communities of color and tribal communities.
- Residents of congregate care settings.
- Plans call for eventually expanding the testing to students and staff at schools and Oregon's

colleges and universities through school-based health centers and other community partners.

Some tests will be maintained as a strategic reserve to ensure a supply beyond December (when the current allocation is scheduled to end) and to be used to contain major outbreaks in counties.

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