

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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MILWAUKEE—On Tuesday, March 17, 2020, the Department of Health Services (DHS) announced that due to a national shortage of COVID-19 laboratory testing materials, the Wisconsin State Laboratory of Hygiene (WSLH) and the Milwaukee Health Department Laboratory (MHDL) are limiting testing to the highest priority patients and health care workers.

Although both laboratories have significantly increased their capacity for COVID-19 testing, the number of samples being received exceeds daily capacity. Both laboratories will be testing high-priority samples from hospitalized patients and health care workers seven days a week for the foreseeable future. Test requests that do not meet the criteria will be sent to other labs in the state and country for testing.

With the increased number of COVID-19 cases reported nationally and identified community spread in Wisconsin, health care providers are urged to prioritize testing for hospitalized patients for whom timely diagnosis of COVID-19 is critical. Testing should be prioritized based on clinical criteria. There is no role for testing asymptomatic patients. The full DHS memo for prioritization of COVID-19 testing can be found [here](#).

“In an effort to maintain capacity and make better use of limited supplies, we have to make sure that individuals who are critically ill, hospitalized or receiving ICU care along with severe clinical symptoms for COVID-19 are processed first,” said Commissioner of Health Jeanette Kowalik. “Prioritizing testing also assures that the City of Milwaukee Health Department can manage the caseload and follow-up of the most critical patients as efficiently and effectively as possible.”

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Testing is not recommended for people with mild, upper respiratory symptoms, or those with mild illnesses for which they would not normally seek medical care. It is recommended that these individuals self-isolate for 14 days at home until their symptoms improve. Information for healthcare providers on testing, guidance and an updated, required triage form are available on the [DHS COVID-19 website](#).

Governor Tony Evers has issued an emergency order prohibiting gatherings of 10 people or more to slow the spread of COVID-19. Think about how you can decrease close contacts and crowded environments while COVID-19 is spreading in the community. According to DHS, this includes avoiding public places and staying home as much as possible. If you cannot avoid public spaces practice social distancing by staying six feet away from other people.

People should follow simple steps to prevent illness and avoid exposure to this virus including:

- Avoid social gatherings with people of all ages (including playdates and sleepovers, parties, large family dinners, visitors in your home, and nonessential workers in your house)
- Frequent and thorough hand washing with soap and water for 20 seconds
- Cover coughs and sneezes
- Avoid touching your face
- Stay home when sick

This is a rapidly evolving situation. For the latest information, visit the CDC's website, the DHS website, or milwaukee.gov/coronavirus.

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