Maine DHHS Announces Plan to Distribute Rapid Antigen Tests for COVID-19

October 29, 2020

AUGUSTA - The Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) announced today its strategy to distribute an allocation of rapid COVID-19 antigen tests to ensure access for all Maine residents, especially those at greater risk of exposure to the virus.

The federal government is distributing the Abbott BinaxNOW COVID-19 point-of-care antigen tests to all 50 states and the District of Columbia. DHHS expects Maine to receive approximately 400,000 BinaxNOW tests periodically through December and has begun receiving shipments. The tests can detect coronavirus infection from a nasal swab sample in approximately fifteen minutes.

"Maine has already built a robust and successful testing strategy that helps us lead the nation in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic," **said DHHS Commissioner Jeanne Lambrew**. "The addition of the BinaxNOW rapid antigen tests will provide a new layer of protection for Maine people as we remain vigilant against this virus."

DHHS is partnering with Walgreens to distribute the bulk of the tests, approximately 300,000, to 65 pharmacy locations from Kittery to Madawaska. This testing will be available to the public at no charge as a drive-through service in November.

"Walgreens is honored to be recognized by the state of Maine to further increase access to COVID-19 testing and in the coming weeks we look forward to serving as a BinaxNOW COVID-19 testing location in select Maine pharmacies," **said Rick Gates, senior vice president of pharmacy, Walgreens**. "Pharmacists' role as part of the health care system and patients' care teams has never been more critical or clear. Walgreens has a long history of stepping up to support our customers and communities in times of need, and we're pleased to be working in collaboration with Maine health officials on this effort."

Following a request for quotes process, DHHS issued a preliminary award to Walgreens and is now finalizing an agreement.

The remaining 100,000 BinaxNOW tests will be distributed through a process that prioritizes access for Maine people who are symptomatic or at elevated risk of exposure to and illness from COVID-19, such as critical infrastructure staf (//www.cisa.gov/sites/default/files/publications/Version_4.0_CISA_Guidance_on_Essential_Critical_Infrastructure_Workers_FINAL%20AUG%2018v3.pdf) f including health care workers, law enforcement and public safety personnel, first responders, and school staff. Qualified organizations that follow DHHS guidance (//www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/infectious-disease/epi/airborne/documents/Binax-Guidance.pdf) for use of the BinaxNOW tests may now apply (//forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=q6g_QX0gYkubzeoajy-GTseHDczroMNHqsaKj3vr645UNjFHU0NRR01UR0k5OTdBWEdaVk5DVjZFWS4u) for an allocation. Since demand may exceed the available supply, DHHS will prioritize facilities that will use them for high-risk populations, in high-risk settings, or where access to COVID-19 testing is otherwise limited. In line with this strategy, Maine DHHS has allocated a portion of BinaxNOW tests to the Maine Department of Corrections, which has deployed them at its facilities as part of its COVID-19 response.

The tests will be distributed to Maine organizations that are not already directly receiving BinaxNOW tests from the federal government. In addition to the 400,000 tests allocated to Maine DHHS, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has also distributed tests directly to congregate care settings such as nursing and assisted living facilities in the state.

The BinaxNOW test has been authorized by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration for testing symptomatic individuals for COVID-19 within the first 7 days of symptoms. It may also be used in limited circumstances to test critical infrastructure staff who are identified to be a close contact of an individual confirmed to have COVID-19.

Even without accounting for the BinaxNOW tests, Maine's testing capacity leads the nation. This capacity - which is at 528 percent of Maine's testing target (//www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/us/coronavirus-testing.html) according to the Harvard Global Health Institute is the result of a deal Governor Mills reached with Maine-based IDEXX Laboratories five months ago. That agreement, as well as partnerships with Maine health care organizations and exceptional work by the State's Health and Environmental Testing Laboratory, allowed Maine to become one of the first states in the nation to eliminate its testing prioritization system and issue a standing order (//www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/infectious-disease/epi/airborne/documents/StandingOrder-Sept-2020-Update.pdf) allowing anyone in Maine who thinks they need a test to get one.

Maine has also established more than two dozen "swab and send" testing locations that offer molecular testing at no charge. The swab and send sites complement the roughly 40 current testing sites already available to the public. For a list of all sites providing tests to people without symptoms and without requiring a provider referral, visit the Keep Maine Healthy website (//www.maine.gov/covid19/restartingmaine/keepmainehealthy/testing) .

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