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News Release
September 15, 2020

Contact information

Health officials begin statewide COVID-19 survey of Minnesota households

Survey includes free COVID-19 testing and will assist in responding to COVID-19 in Minnesota

The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH), with support from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), is conducting a voluntary statewide survey between Sept. 14 and Sept. 30 as part of an ongoing effort to better understand the prevalence of COVID-19 in Minnesota.

The modified Community Assessment for Public Health Emergency Response, or CASPER, survey will include a household questionnaire as well as free virus and antibody testing for SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. Information learned from the survey will help health officials and others who are part of the COVID-19 response make decisions that best meet the needs of our communities.

“Through the CASPER survey, we hope to better understand how COVID-19 is spreading in Minnesota and how it is affecting people,” said Dr. Ruth Lynfield, MDH state epidemiologist. “With a new virus, we have to learn as we go and adapt our response based on new data. Information we gather in this survey will allow us to refine our recommendations to best meet the needs of our Minnesota communities in the prevention of COVID-19.”

The goals of the survey are to:

- Understand how COVID-19 has spread in Minnesota communities.
- Understand what caused COVID-19 to spread in certain areas.
- Explore how COVID-19 transmission and infection rates differ among regions in Minnesota.
- Identify the percentage of people infected with COVID-19 that have no symptoms.
- Improve health messaging and help stop COVID-19 spread.

During the survey period, teams of public health professionals will visit randomly selected households in 180 preselected sites around Minnesota. After agreeing to participate, one member of the household will complete a questionnaire. All household members who consent can receive a COVID-19 test using a swab to test for current infection with the SARS-CoV-2 virus and an antibody test using a finger stick to draw a few drops of blood to see if someone has previously been infected with SARS-CoV-2.

Participants with positive results for either test will be contacted by a nurse to receive additional information. All questionnaire responses and results will be kept private.

“We encourage people to participate in the survey if their household is selected. Along with being able to receive free, in-home testing for current and past COVID-19 infection, this is a unique opportunity for people to help us learn more about the impacts of COVID-19 and aid in our efforts to fight this pandemic,” said Lynfield.

The areas that teams will visit throughout the state are census blocks, used by the U.S. Census Bureau, and were selected using a sampling method that takes into account population size. Households were randomly selected within each area. Only households approached by the investigation teams are eligible to participate. Teams will be wearing facemasks, vests, and badges identifying them as members of the MDH COVID-19 Survey Team.

CDC developed this CASPER approach as an evidence-based tool to assess community needs. The tool has been used to collect household information during public health emergencies such as hurricanes, oil spills, and the Zika virus outbreak. Several other states are also conducting COVID-19 CASPER surveys.

The survey is funded through COVID Relief Funds that MDH received to conduct this survey and other studies—Legislative Advisory Commission 10-day Federal Coronavirus Relief Fund Review Order (PDF) (https://mn.gov/mmb-stat/documents/budget/lac/10-day-federal-crf-review-order-4-6-6-02-2020.pdf).

For more information about this study, visit CASPER: COVID-19 Public Health Survey [expired link].

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