COVID-19 UPDATES

What you need to know (https://agriculture.ny.gov/coronavirus)

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Governor Cuomo Announces New Testing Initiatives to Improve COVID-19 Detection & Control Across New York State

Announces $500,000 for Pilot Program To Test for the Virus in Wastewater Systems as 'Early Warning Indicators' to Detect COVID-19 Spread

After Discovery of New Clusters Tied to Seasonal Farm Workers, State DOH and Agriculture & Markets to Dispatch Mobile Testing Teams to Farms & Assist With Isolation Facilities

SUNY Approved for "Pooled Testing" Approach that Will Dramatically Increase Testing Capacity at SUNY Upstate Medical University

Information for Seasonal Farmworkers Also Announced

NOTE: Information for seasonal farmworkers is available at the bottom of this page.

Governor Andrew M. Cuomo today announced a series of new initiatives related to COVID-19 testing that will improve New York State's ability to detect and control the virus in communities across the state.

The Governor announced the launch of a pilot program to detect the presence of COVID-19 in wastewater, designed to establish an early indicator system to forecast virus spread in communities. $500,000 will support expanding initial wastewater sampling undertaken in Onondaga County and start sample collection in three additional communities, Albany, Newburgh and Buffalo.

In addition, after New York's contact tracing program identified several new clusters at farms linked to seasonal workers who recently traveled to New York, the Governor announced that the Department of Health and Department of Agriculture & Markets will dispatch mobile testing teams to farms in rural counties across the state, as well as assist with access to isolation housing where needed for workers who test positive.

The Governor also announced that the State University of New York has been approved by the New York State Department of Health to undertake pooled surveillance testing for COVID-19 - an innovative method where numerous samples can be run as part of one test. SUNY's pooled testing approach was developed and validated by SUNY Upstate Medical University's laboratory, and will use saliva samples, pooled in batches as small as 10 and as large as 25 samples. SUNY Upstate will be able to conduct at least 12,000 more daily tests as a result of this innovative approach.

"As New Yorkers remain vigilant in stopping the spread and our communities cautiously reopen, we continue to aggressively focus on testing in order to detect and control any new coronavirus outbreaks," **Governor Cuomo said.** "These new testing initiatives, analyzing wastewater for COVID, deploying mobile testing teams to address clusters at farms, and investing in new capacity using pooled testing, will be a critical part of our state's efforts to test, trace and isolate - and defeat the virus."

Wastewater Detection Pilot

The wastewater pilot will be used to assess the feasibility of a statewide initiative to utilize wastewater as a leading indicator of the prevalence of COVID-19 in the population, usefulness in predicting diagnostic testing and contact tracing needs, as well as potential mitigation measures such as hospital preparedness, the need to reinforce Executive Orders or re-evaluate re-opening plans. The New York State Department of Health and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation are partnering in the pilot program with Syracuse University, SUNY Environmental Science and Forestry, SUNY Upstate Medical University, Syracuse-based Quadrant Biosciences, and the engineering consulting firm Arcadis.

Early in the COVID-19 pandemic, scientific studies demonstrated that the genetic material, RNA, of the virus causing the disease, SARS-CoV-2, could be detected in the feces of up to 40 percent of infected individuals, even those who are asymptomatic. Although wastewater is not believed to be a viable source of disease transmission, this provided a strong indication that the genetic signal could potentially be detected in wastewater. Tracking infectious disease transmission through wastewater was used decades ago to track the transmission and eradication of poliovirus.

Limited sampling has already been conducted in the Onondaga County wastewater system and the $500,000 in new funding announced today by the Governor will support the expanded pilot study at an increased frequency of sampling in Onondaga County and in three additional communities, Albany, Newburgh and Buffalo. These communities have features and areas that will allow for specific monitoring of smaller geographic areas such as residential, industrial, commercial and/or resort areas. Up to 12 locations, or sewersheds, will be identified within each community and sampled three times per week over a four-week period to determine trends in the levels of SARS-CoV-2 in each sewershed. The relationship between wastewater virus data and COVID-19 cases within the corresponding area will be analyzed. The pilot study will also provide for an in-depth daily sampling program at 10 locations of high concern or special interest.

"This exciting surveillance program is another tool in New York's pandemic arsenal to evaluate the effectiveness of social distancing measures and the phased reopening of the state," **said New York State Health Commissioner Dr. Howard Zucker.** "As we prepare for an anticipated 'second wave' of virus transmission this fall, we must utilize every piece of available scientific data to inform us and ensure our communities that we remain ahead of the virus when it reemerges."

DEC Commissioner Basil Seggos said, "Throughout the State's response to COVID-19, Governor Cuomo has urged New Yorkers and encouraged the nation to let science determine the safest path forward. This innovative initiative has the potential to provide valuable data and clues that will strengthen the State's ongoing response. In the absence of a national strategy to protect our communities from this virus, millions of Americans have followed New York's lead because our experts are guided by science and this pilot will serve to benefit New Yorkers and potentially the nation."

Mobile Testing for Seasonal Farms Workers

New York State has seen an increase in clusters associated with farms that employ seasonal workers who have traveled from out of state. These clusters have historically been due to the higher number of workers in close proximity since farms and food production facilities have remained open as essential businesses. There are also congregate housing facilities that some farms provide for workers, which pose a higher risk for COVID transmission. Recognizing there are multiple factors that increase risk of COVID transmission present at farms across NYS, the State Department of Health and Department of Agriculture and Markets will deploy mobile testing teams to counties that have the highest influx of seasonal workers. The State will also support as needed with access to isolation housing for workers who test positive.

SUNY Pooled Testing Approval using Saliva

The State University of New York has been approved by the New York State Department of Health to undertake pooled surveillance testing for Covid-19 - an innovative method where numerous samples can be run as part of one test. SUNY's pooled testing approach was developed and validated by SUNY Upstate Medical University's laboratory and Quadrant

Biosciences, and will use saliva samples, pooled in batches as small as 10 and as large as 25 samples.

The pooled testing allows for about 10-25 people to be screened in one test. The testing can be done using saliva rather than by swabs that are inserted in a patients' nose. Individuals administer the tests themselves, swabbing their mouths for 10 or 15 seconds each, and provide the saliva samples to medical personnel.

Their samples are combined into one, which is tested for coronavirus. A negative test means that all 10-25 people in the group are presumed at the time to be coronavirus-free. A positive test for the pool would mean every person in that group would need to be individually tested by a PCR test.

"In the coming weeks, SUNY will reopen higher education across the state with a portion of its 415,000 students and 90,000 employees returning on our 64 campuses," **said Robert Megna, SUNY Officer in Charge**. "Thanks to SUNY Upstate Medical's research team, and Quadrant Biosciences and the team at SUNY System and SUNY Research Foundation, our testing capabilities are significantly expanded. It will be faster and more cost-effective for the surveillance testing we need as we start to resume on-campus living. We thank the Governor for his leadership and the New York Department of Health for approving this testing."

"SUNY Upstate Medical University appreciates the support of the state for the saliva-testing protocol we have developed with Quadrant Biosciences," **said Mantosh Dewan, MD, interim president of SUNY Upstate Medical University**. "Upstate's work with Quadrant Biosciences, a Start-Up New York company, has led to important breakthroughs in the development of saliva-based diagnostic solutions for neurological conditions such as autism spectrum disorder, Parkinson's disease and concussion injuries. The ability to transfer this innovative approach to assist colleges and universities with the unprecedented and complex work of preparing for the return of students to campuses across the state is an important part of New York's response to the COVID pandemic."

Seasonal Worker Testing

The New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets, Department of Health, and the Department of Labor are launching next week a COVID-

19 testing initiative for seasonal workers on New York farms, as announced by Governor Andrew Cuomo today.

The state is making available free, rapid COVID-19 testing to agricultural workers in a number of communities in Orleans, Ulster, Clinton, Wayne and Genesee Counties, which see the highest number of out-of-state workers during harvest season. Farms who hire seasonal workers will be offered an opportunity to have workers tested at locations in this list of communities (/community-listings) .

Information on the testing opportunities will be sent directly to the farms in these communities. Farms who participate in these events must ensure that they:

- Have read, understood and comply with the State's guidelines in the documents listed below.
- Have a plan, including housing available to isolate workers if they test positive, and quarantine workers who are contacts to cases.
- Have a plan to supplement their current workforce, if needed.
- Pre-register (Registration information will be provided next week)

Test samples will be processed at the Department of Health's Wadsworth Laboratory for rapid processing and results.

The Department of Labor will be conducting direct outreach to farm workers and advocacy groups to facilitate their participation in the program and help ensure that language needs are being met.

The preventative testing initiative will also include partnering with the county health departments, county Cornell Cooperative Extensions and New York Farm Bureau to directly engage and educate farmers and farm workers on the State's COVID-19 prevention and quarantine protocols.

From the start of the pandemic, New York State has issued guidelines to assist the agricultural industry remain operational and to provider worker protections. This includes Guidance for Prevention of and Response to COVID-19 on Farms (/interim-guidance-prevention-and-response-covid-19-farms) , Prevention Tips for Farmworkers (/covid-19-prevention-tips-farmworkers) , and an Operator Checklist for Farms (/covid-19-operator-checklist-farms) .

As New York began its phased reopening, New York State outlined mandatory protections for essential workers in its NY Forward guidance (https://www.governor.ny.gov/sites/governor.ny.gov/files/atoms/files/NonFoodAgriSh . In addition, the Department of Agriculture and Markets implemented, with assistance from county Cornell Cooperative Extensions, a robust statewide effort to ensure farms had access to personal protective equipment, such as masks and sanitizer.

To view all guidance provided for New York State farms and the agricultural industry, visit: https://agriculture.ny.gov/coronavirus (/coronavirus)

Community Listings
(/system/files/documents/2020/08/covidcommunitytestinglistings.pdf)

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Contact the Press Office

Contact us by phone:

Albany Press Office (518) 457-0752 (tel:(518) 457-0752)
State Fair Press Office (315) 487-7711 (tel:(315) 487-7711)

Contact us by email:

Jola.Szubielski@agriculture.ny.gov (mailto:Jola.Szubielski@agriculture.ny.
Hanna.Birkhead@agriculture.ny.gc (mailto:Hanna.Birkhead@agriculture.n
Dave.Bullard@agriculture.ny.gov (mailto:Dave.Bullard@agriculture.ny.g

Mailing Address:

The New York State
Department of Agriculture
and Markets
10B Airline Drive
Albany, New York 12235

The Great New York State
Fair
581 State Fair Boulevard

Syracuse, New York 13209

Department of Agriculture and Markets

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