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Gov. Sisolak approves comprehensive COVID-19 testing, contact tracing plan, Interim Finance Committee accepts grant funding to support implementation

Increased capacity for community-based testing, laboratory analysis, and contact tracing will aid COVID-19 response

Carson City, NV – Today, Governor Steve Sisolak announced the approval of a comprehensive community-based testing, laboratory analysis, and contact tracing plan to support local, statewide, and tribal efforts to reopen and keep open the Nevada economy.

"This plan marks a major milestone for the State of Nevada, formalizing and expanding our existing efforts to battle COVID-19 as we embrace our new normal," said Gov. Sisolak. "Creating this plan has been a massive undertaking jointly led by Nevada's Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Emergency Management and State Public Health Laboratory, and I am pleased to begin executing the comprehensive strategy to help protect all Nevadans."

Community-based testing and outbreak management are essential to Nevada's efforts to fully reopen and keep open the Nevada economy. In order to support this effort, Gov. Sisolak approved a comprehensive strategy that will allow communities across Nevada to build capacity, surge when necessary, and make informed decisions, all of which will provide a bridge to normalization of services and industry in our state.

Maximizing the use of federal and state funds will also be critical to successfully implementing the three major components of this effort, and is essential to this federally supported, state managed, and locally executed response. The comprehensive effort will be funded primarily through federal support allocated to the state through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) fund approved through Congress, Epidemiology and Laboratory Capacity grant funds from the U.S. Centers for

Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), as well as reimbursement through the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Public Assistance Program.

The first major component of this plan is ongoing support for community-based testing, which is the cornerstone of Gov. Sisolak's "Nevada United: Roadmap to Recovery." Supporting community-based testing includes providing logistical support for local and tribal communities for sample collection kits, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), and increasing resources for antibody collection. This effort, administered by the Nevada Division of Emergency Management, aims to provide ongoing support and surge capacity of these critical resources in the event of future outbreaks.

Second, this comprehensive effort continues to emphasize building and maintaining statewide laboratory capacity to analyze the samples collected through community-based testing. Over the last few months, Nevada's public laboratories have increased their capacities to an extraordinary degree through public and private resources and support. To build on this new capacity, Nevada is also pursuing innovative partnerships with private labs, hospitals, and clinics in order to increase Nevada's overall testing capacity.

Dr. Mark Pandori will serve as the State's Chief of Testing. Dr. Pandori is currently the Director of the Nevada State Public Health Laboratory and an Associate Professor of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine at the University of Nevada, Reno School of Medicine. Dr. Pandori is temporarily expanding his existing responsibilities to help direct and coordinate Nevada's immediate and long-term testing strategy, which includes increasing testing capacity statewide.

Dr. Pandori has already found innovative and creative solutions to testing issues facing Nevada and the United States, including repurposing testing swabs typically used for other procedures and including the construction of swab collection kits for distribution to the entire state of Nevada.

To ensure that the first two components of this effort are successful, Gov. Sisolak has also approved a policy through a standing order from the Nevada Department of Health and Human Services. This standing order authorizes any Nevada medical provider or trained personnel at a medically supervised COVID-19 testing unit to collect testing samples in the state. This standing order, which includes the above authorization, instructions on proper collections, and the reporting requirements, will assist with streamlining the administrative aspects of Gov. Sisolak's comprehensive community-based testing strategy. This standing order can be found here.

The final major component of the comprehensive effort approved by Gov. Sisolak is supporting Nevada's statewide contact tracing effort, which involves a statewide digital

contact tracing solution through Deloitte and Salesforce. These contracts will be reviewed during an upcoming meeting of the Board of Examiners.

This effort, supported by these national technology leaders, will modernize and streamline case investigation and contact tracing with increased staffing to quickly identify and notify individuals who may have been close contacts to a person with COVID-19. In addition to the utilization of digital tools, Nevada is developing a staffing solution focused on addressing the immediate needs as Phase 2 moves forward, with an increase of more than 250 contact tracers through Deloitte, as well as long-term solutions to address the ongoing public health workforce needs and provide Nevadans with jobs.

Contact tracing is part of the process of supporting patients with COVID-19 infection and each person who has tested positive for COVID-19 will be in contact with public health staff to identify those they interacted with during their infectious period. Public health staff then contact the individuals to inform them of the potential exposure as rapidly and sensitively as possible. Through contact tracing patients are provided information and resources to help them protect their health, and the health of others, and is a key part of Nevada's COVID-19 response.

Nevada has utilized the National Guard to support community testing, laboratory operations, and contact tracing/COVID mapping efforts. In addition to the Guard, the Nevada Systems of Higher Education (NSHE) is working across the state in all institutions to offer a uniform training in contact tracing. Additionally, NSHE will develop a workforce of students, faculty, staff, and volunteers ready to support Nevada's state, local, and tribal public health agencies to meet the case investigation and contact tracing needs. This workforce will not only address the immediate needs related to COVID-19 but will be an ongoing resource to Nevada for communicable disease investigation.

Case identification and contact tracing are the foundation of communicable disease prevention and control and the data gathered though community-based testing and laboratory analysis is vital. For the COVID-19 response, this process will provide an essential tool to understand clusters and respond appropriately and timely to minimize future cases and outbreaks. Together, community-based testing, laboratory analysis, and contact tracing are critical for ensuring that Nevada can continue to safely reopen and stay open during this pandemic.

More information on Nevada's COVID-19 response can be found at nvhealthresponse.nv.gov.

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