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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS TO BEGIN UNIVERSAL COVID-19 TESTING AND LAUNCHES NON-CONGREGATE HOUSING PROGRAM FOR FIRST RESPONDERS

TRENTON, N.J.— May 1, 2020 – The New Jersey Department of Corrections (NJDOC), in partnership with Rutgers University Correctional Healthcare (UCHC) and Accurate Diagnostics Lab, has announced plans to provide COVID-19 tests to staff, inmates, and residents on-site at each of NJDOC's facilities and halfway houses.

The plan leverages the FDA-approved Rutgers saliva test administered to NJDOC's staff of approximately 8,000 employees and 18,000 inmates by UCHC. Universal testing is expected to begin by the end of next week and will help the Department inform its operational needs related to the management of the infirm while maintaining the safe operation of facilities.

Additionally, in support of staff safety, the NJDOC is obtaining full-service non-congregate housing for its first responders and Rutgers UCHC staff members with exposure to the virus through a program offered by the NJ Office of Emergency Management (NJOEM) and FEMA. The temporary housing will utilize available hotels and provide a safe place for those exposed to COVID-19 in order to minimize the risk of exposure to immediate family members or living companions.

Non-congregate housing will be made available within the next week. NJDOC encourages all eligible staff members to take advantage of the program.

“This comprehensive plan is a result of the Department’s steadfast commitment to protect the health of staff and inmates, while ensuring the safe operation of our correctional facilities,” said Governor Murphy. “This action represents the single largest mass testing initiative by a State department. I commend Commissioner Hicks and his team for their efforts to provide universal testing to more than 25,000 people and implement a proper response for testing outcomes.”

“When the COVID-19 crisis hit, New Jersey – like much of the nation and the world —we faced an unprecedented situation that included the lack of access to testing,” said Commissioner Marcus O. Hicks, Esq. “Despite these challenges, with the safety of our employees and those in our custody in mind, the NJDOC immediately took action to mitigate the spread of the virus from increasing access to PPE and sanitization products, to modifying our operations to accommodate for social distancing guidance -- all while working on the back-end to realize the goal of universal testing. Appreciating the challenges our first responders face on the job and the value they place on the safety of their respective families, it’s my hope that by providing non-congregate housing, we are providing some peace of mind in support of our hard-working staff and those they love.”

“From the outset of the pandemic, our goal at Rutgers has been to use the full breadth of our research capabilities in service of the state,” said Rutgers Biomedical and Health Sciences Chancellor Dr. Brian L. Strom. “Rutgers and New Jersey have made tremendous strides with respect to testing and I believe the saliva-based test developed by RUCDR and Rutgers-New Brunswick is a linchpin to a health and economic recovery. In addition, we have a long-standing relationship through our University Correctional Health Care to provide medical care in New Jersey’s prisons and we are pleased that this innovative test can be used to enhance health and safety for staff and inmates.”

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