COVID-19 Vaccine (https://mn.gov/covid19/vaccine/find-vaccine/locations/index.jsp) – Find out when, where, and how to get your shot.

Vaccine Rewards (https://mn.gov/covid19/vaccine-rewards/index.jsp) – Your shot to a safe summer. Claim your reward by June 30.

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Governor Walz Announces Expansion of Saliva Testing Program

State announces opening of saliva testing sites in Moorhead, Brooklyn Park; free saliva testing to anyone who needs it

October 13, 2020

[St. Paul, MN] – Governor Tim Walz and Lieutenant Governor Peggy Flanagan today announced the expansion of the state's saliva testing program, including the opening of new saliva testing sites and a pilot of the mail order program. Semi-permanent saliva testing sites will open in Moorhead on October 17 and Brooklyn Park on October 20. These sites will offer free saliva tests to any Minnesotan who believes they need to be tested, as part of the state's strategy to provide easy access to quick, reliable testing.

"Widespread testing is critical to our state's strategy to combat COVID-19," said Governor Walz. **"By increasing access to testing across Minnesota, these saliva testing sites will allow us to better track, understand, and fight the virus in our communities."**

"These new testing sites will help eliminate barriers to testing, giving Minnesotans access to saliva testing with a quick and reliable turnaround of results," said Lieutenant Governor Flanagan. **"The progress we've made on our state's testing strategy is the product of working in partnership with community leadership, local public health officials, health care systems, and many others."**

Saliva testing has been underway in Duluth since September 23 and testing will begin in Winona tomorrow. In addition to the new Brooklyn Park and Moorhead locations, the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) will open an additional six sites later this month—two in Greater Minnesota and four more in the metro area—for a total of 10 such sites across the state. Details on those locations will be announced when available. Full details can be found on the COVID-19 Community Saliva Testing (https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/testsites/saliva.html) website.

Testing has increased more than 65 percent since early September, and during that time the positivity rate has remained steady at an elevated level. According to Minnesota Commissioner of Health Jan Malcolm, this sustained high rate is a warning sign for the state.

"The high positivity rate means there's a lot of disease transmission, and we need to take that very seriously," Commissioner Malcolm said. **"Our neighboring states offer a cautionary tale for how quickly things can escalate. If we want to avoid the alarming scenarios we've seen elsewhere we need all Minnesotans to focus on doing their part. That means maintaining social distance and avoiding crowded places, wearing a mask in public spaces, frequently and thoroughly washing hands, and staying at home when sick or during a quarantine period when you've been exposed to COVID."**

Since the state opened its first COVID-19 saliva testing site in Duluth, 7,879 people have been tested. Overall positivity for the three weeks of operation is at 5.72% and each week individually has been above 5%.

"These semi-permanent testing sites increase access to testing for Minnesotans all across the state," said Dan Huff, MDH assistant commissioner for health protection. **"We're pleased people are seeking out testing when they need it. The fewer barriers, the more likely someone is to get tested. The more versatile our testing capacity is, the more resilient we can be in serving all Minnesotans."**

In Moorhead, the testing site will be located at the former Thomas Edison High School. It opens on Saturday, October 17, as the state's third semi-permanent site and first in western Minnesota.

"Testing is key to controlling COVID-19 in Moorhead. It is necessary for our businesses and schools to remain open and services functioning. We appreciate Minnesota Department of Health making this free, accessible testing resource available, increasing Moorhead's resiliency during the pandemic," said Moorhead Mayor Johnathan Judd.

In Brooklyn Park, the former Office Max building in the Starlite Center will host the saliva testing site. It opens on Tuesday, October 20, and will be the first saliva testing site to open in the metro. Due to expected demand, it will be open seven days a week initially. The State and Vault will reevaluate hours of each site as others open and demand waxes and wanes with disease progression in Minnesota.

"Ensuring our community has accessible health services is a top priority in Brooklyn Park right now," said Mayor Jeffrey Lunde. **"Thank you to the state and the county for making this COVID-19 testing site possible so we can ensure our residents and all Minnesotans stay safe."**

Each semi-permanent test site employs 10-20 local Minnesotans who operate the site and supervise collection of saliva samples.

The semi-permanent testing sites are part of the state's broader saliva testing program, which will also include a mail order program. The COVID-19 Testing at Home program will allow Minnesotans to register online and receive their at-home testing kit via UPS. State officials are finalizing some details of the program and expect to launch a pilot in several counties soon. The program is also being piloted by faculty and staff at the University of Minnesota and Minnesota State Colleges and University.

These tests will be processed in Minnesota at the new Infinity Biologix (IBX) COVID saliva lab in Oakdale, Minnesota, which will open next week. The new lab will reduce shipping time by allowing samples to be couriered from collection sites in the state instead of being shipped to the IBX lab in New Jersey. At full operating capacity, the lab will employ up to 250 Minnesotans. More details of opening day will be announced soon.

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