North Dakota officials outline plan to expand testing capacity for COVID-19

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BISMARCK, N.D. – Gov. Doug Burgum and Maj. Gen. Alan Dohrmann, director of the North Dakota Department of Emergency Services, today outlined a plan to significantly increase testing capacity for COVID-19, a critical component for protecting vulnerable populations and reopening businesses in the state.

“Widespread rapid testing is one of the key elements for our step-by-step plan for a North Dakota Smart Restart,” Burgum said. “We’re grateful to our State Lab and partners across the state who are working to expand testing capacity and contact tracing to protect lives and livelihoods.”

“North Dakota has a strong testing strategy that is focused around testing several core groups including health care workers, residents and staff at long-term care facilities, and other vulnerable populations,” said Dohrmann, co-leader of the Unified Command for the state’s COVID-19 response. “Testing efforts also are being focused around large businesses that have seen positive cases of COVID-19, as well as their close contacts, in an effort to mitigate large outbreaks.”

This week, the North Dakota Department of Health (NDDoH) State Lab added nine lab professionals to help meet a goal of expanding to 1,800 tests per day by April 30. The lab has six additional pieces of equipment on order and hopes to increase capacity to 3,000 tests per day next month, Dohrmann said. The lab also has added space to increase capacity, with new equipment being installed today, and is in the process of validating serology testing that looks for the presence of antibodies, which also will play an important role in fully reopening the economy.

The state had 22 Abbot ID Now machines before the pandemic and has since added 15 new machines, deploying 13 of them to local laboratories. Abbott ID Now machines provide rapid testing with results in 15 minutes or less. Health care providers and private labs also are bringing new methods online to

improve testing capacity in North Dakota. Dohrmann stressed that the state continues to work with health care providers to ensure they have adequate supplies to test symptomatic individuals for COVID-19, and that the state continues to expand contact tracing capacity.

The state continues to partner with tribal nations, conducting successful test collection events at both MHA Nation and Spirit Lake Nation which resulted in roughly 700 individuals being tested, including 290 at Spirit Lake on Tuesday. In addition, the state is focusing on long-term care facilities to protect the most vulnerable citizens, Dohrmann said. Representatives from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention also are working with the NDDoH Division of Disease Control to prioritize and outline surveillance test collection strategies.

The NDDoH today confirmed 35 additional cases of COVID-19, bringing the state's total to 679 confirmed cases, including 436 active cases. Twenty-three people are currently hospitalized; 229 have recovered and 14 people with COVID-19 have died. A total of 15,589 tests have been completed, ranking North Dakota ninth in the nation for per-capita testing rate.

For more information on the state's COVID-19 response, visit www.health.nd.gov/coronavirus or www.ndresponse.gov.

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