Mills Administration Broadens Standing Order to Allow Anyone in Maine To Get Tested for COVID-19

September 22, 2020

State's vastly expanded testing capacity must still be used wisely

AUGUSTA- Governor Janet Mills and Commissioner of Health and Human Services Jeanne Lambrew announced today that anyone in Maine can now get tested for COVID-19 without the need for a separate order from a health care provider, a milestone resulting from Maine's vastly expanded testing capacity.

The Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) has broadened its Standing Order (PDF) (//www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/infectious-disease/epi/airborne/documents/StandingOrder-Sept-2020-Update.pdf) to include all individuals who think they need a COVID-19 test. This means that participating sites may test anyone in Maine over the age of 12 months who feels they need a test, even if they don't have a primary care provider or a written order from a clinician.

This expanded access is made possible by Maine's expanded testing capacity, including ramping up operations at the State lab, partnering with Maine-based IDEXX Laboratories Inc., and developing nearly 30 "swab and send" testing locations throughout Maine.

As of yesterday, Maine is conducting 400 tests per 100,000 people, a State record. Maine ranks first in the nation on the percentage of people tested according to a target level developed by researchers at the Harvard Global Health Institute.

"Increased access to testing is a critical part of the strategy to mitigate the spread of this deadly virus, to return kids to school safely, and to ensure that our economy stays up and running," said Governor Janet Mills. "This expanded order is another step forward in our ongoing battle against COVID-19 as Maine continues to be a national leader in testing capacity."

"Today's broadening of the Standing Order is the result of months of work and effective partnerships with health care organizations across Maine," **said DHHS Commissioner Jeanne Lambrew**. "While it represents a significant milestone, testing alone will not defeat this virus. Maine people must remain vigilant with the public health measures that prevent the spread of COVID-19."

Additionally, the Standing Order now also applies to antigen testing, in addition to PCR (molecular) testing. The clinical performance of rapid antigen tests largely depends on the circumstances in which they are used. Rapid antigen tests perform best when the person is tested in the early stages of infection with coronavirus when viral load is generally highest. The Standing Order does not apply to antibody testing, which has not been proven reliable.

While it's always best to talk with a health care provider about getting a COVID-19 test, those who believe they've been exposed to COVID-19 may get a test at a site operating under the Standing Order. The Order helps people who don't have a primary health care provider, can't communicate in a timely way with their health care provider, or are visiting Maine or coming back to Maine from another state, for example.

Previously, the DHHS Standing Order broadly allowed people with known exposure or elevated risk of exposure to the virus to get tested, with or without symptoms. Now, people who feel they need a test who are not otherwise at high risk can get tested, with or without symptoms.

Maine CDC continues to encourage people experiencing symptoms to get tested, as well as close contacts of infected individuals, people of color, and others at high risk of COVID-19.

While more people in Maine can now get tested under the Standing Order at participating sites, not everyone should get tested. Testing capacity has been vastly expanded but resources must continue to be used wisely. Maine CDC does not recommend, for example, that people get tested for peace of mind before visiting another household or attending a gathering. This is because a person could already have been exposed but been tested too early for the virus to be detected, or could be exposed to COVID-19 after getting tested. Testing alone is notprevention, and a negative test does not necessarily mean it's safe to gather with others.The best ways to prevent the spread of COVID-19 are to practice physical distancing and good hand hygiene and wear a face covering in public.

The U.S. CDC also does not advise frequent, routine testing in most circumstances.

Dozens of sites across Maine have been providing testing under the Standing Order since it was first issued in June. This includes all of Maine's 27 Swab and Send sites. The Swab and Send sites complement the roughly 40 current testing sites already available to the public. For a list of all sites providing tests to people without symptoms and without requiring a provider referral, visit the Keep Maine Healthy website (//www.maine.gov/covid19/restartingmaine/keepmainehealthy/faqs) .

Some of the organizations operating Swab and Send sites, as well as other organizations, are offering testing to their patients at additional sites as well. For a complete and frequently updated list of COVID-19 testing sites in Maine, visit Get-Tested-COVID19.org (https://get-tested-covid19.org/) .

DHHS covers the full costs of specimen collection and lab testing for any COVID-19 lab test done at one of the State-contracted Swab and Send sites through at least October 31, 2020. For other testing sites, individuals should confirm coverage with their health plan as well as ask about any payments that may be required.

The DHHS Standing Order complements but does not replace patients' relationship with their health care provider. It also does not require all health care providers or COVID-19 test collection sites to provide a test.

It's always best to call a testing site before going to schedule an appointment, which is typically required. Policies on minimum age for testing vary among locations, so individuals should check before seeking a test for anyone under 18. Children 12 months and younger should see a health care provider for a COVID-19 test.

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For a list of frequently asked questions on the Standing Order, visit Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Standing Order for COVID-19 Lab Testing Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) (//www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/infectious-disease/epi/airborne/documents/Standing-Order-FAQ-9-22-20.pdf)

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