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 Free COVID-19 Saliva Tests for Teachers, School Staff, Child Care

As school resumes across state, more than 250,000 saliva tests provided to school and child care employees in effort to limit exposures and disease spread

September 3, 2020

Today, Governor Tim Walz announced that teachers, school staff, and childcare providers across the state have received access to their free COVID-19 saliva test, totaling more than 250,000 tests. The saliva tests are part of the Safe Learning Plan for the 2020-21 School Year and consistent with Governor Walz and Lt. Governor Peggy Flanagan's commitment to providing access to COVID-19 testing for Minnesotans working in child care and prekindergarten to grade 12 schools.

"As a classroom teacher for more than 20 years and a parent of a child in public schools, I know that a safe classroom is the foundation for learning," said Governor Walz. **"Those educating and caring for Minnesota's next generation deserve the peace of mind that these COVID-19 tests will provide."**

The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) has emailed thousands of unique codes that can be used to request a saliva test, which schools will distribute to all staff currently employed by Minnesota's school districts, charter schools, tribal schools, and nonpublic schools. Additionally, the Department of Human Services (DHS) has provided codes to all staff currently working in licensed child care settings and certified centers.

"All families in our state, including our littlest Minnesotans, want to know their teachers, school nutrition workers, and child care staff are supported. This means if they are exposed to COVID-19 as a frontline worker, we work to make sure they have access to testing," said Lt Governor Flanagan. **"Our goal is to create safe in-person learning for as many children as possible, and saliva tests are one piece of the puzzle to support that plan."**

The tests are provided through a partnership with Vault Health and Infinity Biologix (formerly RUCDR Infinite Biologics, a unit of Rutgers University Human Genetics Institute of New Jersey), the nation's leading providers of saliva testing. Governor Walz recently announced that the state would be partnering further with the company, to make saliva testing available to all Minnesotans.

Providing testing to roughly 250,000 education and child care professionals is estimated to cost the state $6 million. Insurers will first be billed for medically necessary tests and uninsured individuals will be covered via federal Health Resources and Services Administration funding. The state will act as a payer of last resort, backstopping the cost of tests not covered by other payers so that education and child care professionals will not be responsible for payment.

"A central part of our state's COVID strategy is testing," said Minnesota Department of Health Commissioner Jan Malcolm. **"Adding saliva testing to our testing ecosystem both grows and diversifies our testing capacity. Teachers, school staff, child care center employees have a responsibility to get tested if they believe they've been in contact with someone who tested positive for COVID-19 or are feeling symptoms themselves. We hope this test will provide a convenient, reliable, and quick option for them."**

Teachers and staff are not required to take the tests before coming back to the classroom or to continue working in a child care setting. State officials urge them to get tested when they need it, such as when they're feeling symptomatic or when they believe they may have been exposed to someone who is COVID positive. The tests must be used by the end of 2020, though the state is exploring options to extend access for the remainder of the 2020-21 school year.

"Every single educator and school staff member across our state has worked tirelessly to prepare for the upcoming school year and we need to make sure we have their back," said Minnesota Department of Education Commissioner Mary Cathryn Ricker. **"I'm pleased we are able to offer this resource to every school district, charter school, tribal school, and nonpublic school employee providing in-person instruction or support to our students, so they can have access to a COVID-19 test."**

“Child care has remained open throughout this public health crisis ensuring that children have the nurturing and safe care they need while families need to be working,” said Minnesota Department of Human Services Commissioner Jodi Harpstead. **“They are heroes during these unprecedented times putting in the extra time to implement the public health guidance. We must ensure that each provider has access to a test whenever it is needed.”**

School and child care staff are currently limited to one test per person under this program. They will use the same process for anyone taking a Vault Health COVID-19 saliva test, which includes spitting into a funnel while connected with a Vault test supervisor over a Zoom video call. Education professionals and child care staff will still be able to seek testing at their regular medical provider, local testing location, or when the state offers community collection events. Home schools are not covered by this program.

Vaulth Health is the go-to testing company for major Fortune 500 companies, sports leagues, and universities, including the PGA and Purdue University. State officials expect to open a saliva lab in Oakdale, Minnesota by early October, which would be capable of processing up to 30,000 samples a day. Read more about the saliva lab and making saliva testing available to all Minnesotans here.

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