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News Release
February 24, 2021

Minnesota launches youth testing campaign

Health officials ask families to get tested every two weeks until end of school year

Even as more people across the state are getting vaccinated, public health officials are reminding Minnesotans that COVID-19 testing remains an important tool for limiting disease impacts and ending the pandemic as quickly as possible.

With that goal in mind the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) today announced a new focus on testing for young people, asking families to get tested every two weeks from now until the end of the school year. MDH officially launched the campaign today, which will include targeted outreach to families, health professionals, schools, and youth organizations to encourage regular COVID-19 testing.

“Over the past few months, the number of students attending in-person classes has significantly increased, with thousands more expected to return to the classroom in coming weeks,” said MDH Assistant Commissioner Dan Huff. “With the rate of infection in decline, Governor Walz has adjusted the dials so children and young adults can resume

youth sports and other activities. To protect this progress, we need to use all the tools at our disposal. That's why we are asking parents to make regular testing a priority for their families. Testing can help spot a single case early and prevent it from becoming many cases."

The recommendation is for all youth returning to school, youth sports, or extracurricular activities to get tested every two weeks through the end of the school year. While it is not a requirement, health officials say regular testing complements other safety measures already in place, such as masking and social distancing. MDH will be providing a range of online resources schools and youth organizations can send to families to encourage testing. The state has also updated its own testing resources to make testing easier to do for families.

"Testing will continue to be a critical part of our COVID-19 response for as long as there are still cases in the state," Huff said. "Our mitigation measures break down without adequate testing. Even as we continue to successfully vaccinate a growing number of people in our state, we also continue to expand our mitigation testing programs for child care providers and educators."

Extension of child care provider testing program

This week the state extended its testing program for child care providers (https://mn.gov/mmb/childcare/providers/testing-program/). The Walz Administration launched a pilot of the testing program in November before expanding to more than 180 early care and education programs across the state. Participating programs offer optional testing for all staff on-site every other week at no cost to the program or individuals.

"Child care providers have been on the front lines since the beginning of this pandemic, nearly a year ago," said Jenny Moses, program manager of the Governor's Children's Cabinet. "These providers are by and large women, many of them women of color, who have come to work every single day, risking virus exposure to care for and educate our youngest Minnesotans and support our communities' needs. Extending this program through June will help decrease the risk of spread between staff, those they care for, and the families they serve."

Continued participation in educator testing program

The state also continues to expand the educator testing program, particularly as more schools plan to return to in-person teaching. More than 1,700 buildings are now registered for the program, representing public, private, charter, and tribal schools. More than 72,700 tests have been administered, with a positivity rate of 0.35 percent.

As of today, 88 percent of districts and charters are offering some form of in-person learning. In early December, half of all schools were in distance learning; today only 12 percent of districts and charters are offering only distance learning.

"Each week we see more of our educators vaccinated," said Minnesota Department of Education Deputy Commissioner Heather Mueller. "It is bringing hope and relief for the thousands of educators returning to the classroom. But we know it will take time for everyone to get vaccinated; and until we have enough supply to vaccinate everyone in our communities, we need to protect everyone in the classroom as well as their families. Regular testing of educators continues, and we ask parents to please join us in that commitment by seeking out regular testing for themselves and their children."

MDH recommends that providers and staff who are participating in the state's testing programs continue to do so until even after they receive their second dose of vaccine. Even after an individual has received two doses of the vaccine it is important that they continue to follow all public health guidance to reduce the spread of COVID-19. This includes staying home when sick, wearing a mask, staying 6 feet from others, washing your hands, following quarantine and isolation requirements, and getting tested when needed.
-MDH-

Minnesota Helpline:

For questions related to the COVID-19 pandemic, call 651-297-1304 or 1-800-657-3504.

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