**Sentinel Testing**

Sentinel testing allows for any entity to randomly test a percentage of staff and residents in their care each month to monitor and protect the workplace/environment from COVID-19. Counties may utilize CARES Act Funding to conduct sentinel testing among their government/municipal staff, within county jails, county courthouse staff, law enforcement staff, schools, shelters and even essential businesses. Counties may elect to enter into to a cost sharing partnership with businesses or other entities in their communities to support testing efforts.

Please see information below for how to initiate sentinel testing within your community:

1. Identify which populations or entities you wish engage in sentinel testing. This can be by facility or industry within your county. Examples include: county or municipal jails, county or municipal staff, schools, shelters, developmental disability community providers and residents, essential businesses, etc.
2. Determine your desired monthly testing level. Determining a testing level often requires looking at many different factors including: the level of COVID-19 activity within your county; the vulnerability of the populations you are testing; and the ability/willingness of the population to implement or adhere to other prevention measures such as social distancing and wearing masks.
   1. Many experts (CDC, Harvard Global Health Institute) recommended testing between 2% and 10% of your population each month. So if you were to implement sentinel testing within a county jail, you should test between 2% and 10% of the jail population and staff each month.
      1. 2% would represent the minimum amount of sentinel testing. Facilities with more vulnerable populations; higher risk of exposure; or locations with higher rates of COVID activity should test a higher percentage of their population each month.
      2. Counties with higher positivity rates (meaning 10% or more of your county’s total testing is positive) should consider increased sentinel testing. A county’s positivity rate should be less than 10% and ideally less than 5%.
      3. More vulnerable populations would include those living in congregate care settings (jails, shelters, group homes, dormitories, etc.) or those at higher risk for serious illness and poor outcomes (those with underlying medical conditions, older individuals, etc.)
      4. Examples of folks with a higher risk of exposure would include individuals with higher rates of public facing responsibilities or work in industries or settings where social distancing and/or wearing a mask are not possible.
3. Determine how testing will occur. There are five main components to testing; a physician’s order; specimen collection; specimen processing; reporting/notification of results; and contract tracing of positive individuals.
   1. Physician’s order—some labs or medical providers will require a physician’s order to run and COVID-19 test. If the county or entity conducting the surveillance testing will be paying for the testing, a physician’s order is not always needed.
   2. Specimen collection—entities that have the capability (have appropriate medical personnel such as nurses) may be able to collect their own specimens. In addition, testing methodologies and options are evolving rapidly. There may be self-administration options available very soon.
   3. Specimen processing—entities will need to identify a laboratory capable of processing their specimens. You will need to discuss which type of tests your laboratory of choice can process.
   4. Reporting/Notification of results—entities will need to have a plan in place notifying employees of their results and providing them direction on isolation and quarantine if they are positive. Entities will also need to have a plan for insuring all proper notifications to health authorities are completed.
   5. Contract Tracing—entities should have a plan in place for rapidly conducting contract tracing as it pertains to the facility conducting testing. Facilities engaging in sentinel testing should be able to quickly identify staff or residents that may have had direct contact with the positive individual while in the facility. This information should be shared with the local health authorities.
4. Once a county or facility has thought through the main components of testing, there are two basic methods to establishing a sentinel testing process.
   1. Contract Everything Approach—counties or a facility could work with a local hospital, FQHC, health department, medical system, etc. to collect specimens, have them processed and provide results to the county/facility.
      1. In this approach, the county/facility conducting the sentinel testing will still be required to provide notification to their employees/residents and collect contract tracing information specific to the facility conducting the testing.
   2. Do It Yourself Approach—counties or a facility could use a combination of existing staff/resources and contracted support to complete the sentinel testing.
      1. Specimen collection could be done by existing staff (if the facility has appropriate medical personnel) or could be contracted to an appropriate entity.
      2. The county or facility conducting sentinel testing would identify and contract with a laboratory to process the specimens collected.
      3. In this approach, the county/facility conducting the sentinel testing will still be required to provide notification to their employees/residents and collect contract tracing information specific to the facility conducting the testing.