

Summary: South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control

DHEC continues to work with MUSC, SCHA, and other community partners (e.g. Federally Qualified Health Centers) to implement the statewide testing plan. This partnership has made significant progress advancing the state's testing goals; however, to increase the state's testing capacity, several challenges must be overcome:

- shortages in PPE and testing supplies,
- staffing (exacerbated by heat),
- a lack of suitable venues (traffic, space, shelter, etc.), and
- responding to local needs and hotspots while ensuring equitable access to testing across the state.

While DHEC has worked to address these issues directly, other challenges remain. As part of this effort, DHEC has made several process improvements—increasing the number of mobile testing sites, offering clients the option to receive test results electronically, and maximizing the capacity of our public health laboratory (PHL). To increase PHL capacity, DHEC has extended laboratory hours seven days a week, brought in additional equipment, repurposed office and conference room space into worktops, reprogrammed equipment to meet the needs for the response, and transitioned to a multiplex PCR testing methodology to shorten testing times. In addition, DHEC has secured purchase orders with several private laboratories for supplemental laboratory capacity.

DHEC requires additional funding to sustain and advance its efforts to combat COVID-19 to include funding:

- to support **testing** by hiring additional staff and specimen collectors where needed, to purchase additional PPE for DHEC staff and testing partners and the space to house it, and to purchase testing supplies and equipment;
- to support **case investigation and contact monitoring** of symptomatic students in public schools, residents and staff of nursing homes, and students and staff in higher education;
- to purchase and administer **flu vaccines** to reduce the burden of influenza on healthcare systems already overburdened with COVID-19; and
- for **COVID-19 vaccines**, to support distribution, administration, and secure cold storage.

In the long-term, funding is necessary to rebuild the state's public health infrastructure to support preparedness for future events as well as to enhance the health of the state's residents and communities.

DHEC has made the following recommendations to the Testing & Tracing Subcommittee:

- Advocate alongside our congressional delegation to increase supply of and access to rapid testing methods
- Expand insurance coverage for COVID-19 testing for mildly symptomatic or asymptomatic individuals
- Consider flexible solutions for testing, including expanding scope of practice for licensed practical nurses and medical assistants to collect specimens, empowering registered nurses to order COVID-19 tests and collect those specimens without medical provider oversight and a physician's order, empowering laboratories to accept and test such specimens, or, alternatively, authorize DHEC physicians to issue statewide standing orders for these activities under the Emergency Health Powers Act, and providing those physicians immunity from liability related to those orders
- Alleviate the burden of administrative reporting requirements on agency staff also engaged in COVID-19 response and oversight by suspending or extending due dates for reports such as the Annual Accountability Report (§ 1-1-810), Pandemic Influenza Report (Proviso 34.31), Fines and Fees Report (Proviso 117.73), and reports required under the Hospital Infections Disclosure Act (§ 44-7-2440)
- Consider an incentive, such a tax credit, for hotels which work with DHEC and its partners to provide non-congregate shelter for indigent individuals and individuals experiencing homelessness to quarantine or isolate while receiving essential wraparound services such as case management and mental health support (such noncongregate shelter would also be a critical need should a hurricane require medical needs sheltering)
- Consider requiring electronic submission of laboratory results to DHEC via Electronic Lab Report or via SCIONx
- Clarify DHEC's authority in the Emergency Health Powers Act to authorize individuals or professionals to perform vaccinations to include addressing insurance coverage, liability protection, and reimbursement for those individuals or professionals
- Provide that volunteers be eligible for workers' compensation for injuries sustained while engaged in the duties assigned during an emergency by DHEC, another state agency, or a political subdivision