




MEMORANDUM

Date: April 1, 2020

To: The Honorable Chairman and Members
Pima County Board of Supervisors

From: C.H. Huckelberry
County Administrator 

Re: **Current COVID-19 Testing in Pima County**

To date 3,101 COVID-19 tests have been collected and processed in Pima County and represent roughly 15% of all tests performed across the state of Arizona. The vast majority of that testing capacity has come online during the last 10 days and reflects tremendous increases in testing capacity among the major laboratory providers principally Sonora Quest and Labcorp; although there has also been a modest expansion of capacity at the State's Public Health Laboratory.

Testing continues to be a scarce enough resource that only individuals in high-risk categories should undergo testing. This includes only symptomatic individuals that have any of the following characteristics: hospitalization with respiratory symptoms; those living in congregate settings; and first responder and health care workers. At this time, individuals should not be tested due to the scarcity of this resource.

COVID-19 testing is among the highest priorities in this pandemic response, and increasing capacity to test will inform emergency response planning and focus resources strategically. The existing governmental and commercial laboratory testing facilities are unable to meet the needs of this community. The Pima County Health Department has been tasked with identifying additional testing resources, including both much-needed (specimen acquisition) supplies and test processing facilities.

The Health Department has secured agreements in principal with two in-state laboratory entities to receive and process COVID-19 test requests. The Translational Genomics Research Institute (TGen) in Flagstaff, Arizona, has committed to running up to 5,000 COVID-19 tests per month for Pima County, while Paradigm Laboratories, with locations in Tucson and Maricopa County, is in line for at least 5,000 additional tests per week. This will greatly enhance test throughput and provide Pima County with the data necessary to inform the public health emergency response.

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A primary obstacle to testing has been the availability of proper specimen collection kits. COVID-19 testing requires plastic-shafted, synthetic-tipped swabs and stable viral transport medium (VTM). Both items were immediately unavailable from all standard procurement channels. Collaborators at the University of Arizona immediately took action to begin synthesizing VTM and offered to provide it to health care facilities for use in COVID-19 testing, and have secured a number of the necessary swabs to collect specimens for analysis. To date they have provided the community with 1,400 test kits, including 400 to the Pima County Health Department, and are awaiting their next shipment of swabs to prepare an additional 10,000 kits. TGen North has confirmed that the VTM and collection kits assembled by this lab are valid for their analysis and tests will begin processing imminently. Paradigm has assured the Health Department that they have adequate test kit supplies and are in the final steps of validating new equipment. In an estimated 7-14 days they will begin processing Pima County tests.

Additionally, 170 aliquots of VTM was transferred to the contract health care provider at the Pima County Adult Detention Complex this week for use among symptomatic detainees. These would be processed by their contracted laboratory provider (Bioreference Labs). This resource will help ensure the safety of the Adult Detention Center detainee population for whom Pima County bears responsibility.

CHH/mp

c: Jan Leshar, Chief Deputy County Administrator
Francisco Garcia, MD, MPH, Deputy County Administrator and Chief Medical Officer,
Health and Community Services
Bob England, MD, MPH, Health Services Director