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# MEMORANDUM

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Date: September 23, 2021

To: The Honorable Rex Scott, Member  
Pima County Board of Supervisors

From: C.H. Huckelberry  
County Administrator 

Re: **COVID-19 Testing of Asylum Seekers or Individuals Released to Pima County by US Customs and Border Protection or the Border Patrol**

You raised a question regarding whether the agency operating the Port of Entry, the US Customs and Border Protection Agency, or Border Patrol who enforces border security between ports of entry require COVID-19 testing.

We have asked this question in the past and receive fairly mixed answers from the Border Patrol. Early on when we began accepting asylum seekers in April 2020, I raised this question when we had individuals released from the Ajo border station to the County. The answer I got then was that, no they did not because it was not in their national medical services contract.

More recently, we asked the same question and got an answer stating:

"BP does not have medical professionals onsite and/or that is not part of their mission."

Regarding US Customs and Border Protections, the answer is possibly yes, if those individuals are kept in their custody for any length of time. Again, it is probably intermittent and unreliable.

For these reasons, we have required COVID-19 rapid BinaxNOW testing of any asylum seeker turned over to the County for processing. This processing occurs through our facility operated by Catholic Community Services known as Casa Alitas. These individuals also receive a basic medical check as well as a COVID-19 test. If positive, they are then isolated for the duration of the infection period in a separate facility. If negative, the individual can be housed within Casa Alitas or another facility for high volume overflow of asylum seekers.

Until recently, the daily releases varied between 25 to 100 individuals per day. These numbers are now beginning to consistently be 100, plus per day. It should be noted these asylum seekers are only housed in Casa Alitas for 36 to 48 hours until transportation can be arranged to their final point of temporary residence while they await an asylum hearing in the Federal Court system. In almost all cases, asylum seekers have some "sponsor," typically, a relative who arranges transportation to the location for their asylum hearing.

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During their medical processing, asylum seekers are also offered a COVID-19 vaccination. This vaccination will soon become required for those eligible.

It should be noted that all of the costs incurred by the County for transportation, housing, COVID-19 testing and vaccination is paid for through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Food and Shelter grant that has been obtained by the County for this purpose.

In a related matter, on September 14, 2021, the US Citizenship and Immigration Services announced that COVID-19 vaccination is required for all immigration medical examinations. In general, individuals applying to become a lawful permanent resident or other applicant must undergo an immigration medical examination. In essence, those asylum seekers, when applying to become a lawful permanent resident, must be fully vaccinated for COVID-19. Based on this, we will start requiring vaccination of those asylum seekers who are eligible.

CHH/anc

c: The Honorable Chair and Members, Pima County Board of Supervisors  
Jan Leshner, Chief Deputy County Administrator  
Francisco García, MD, MPH, Deputy County Administrator & Chief Medical Officer,  
Health and Community Services  
Terry Cullen, MD, MS, Public Health Director, Pima County Health Department