



MEMORANDUM

Date: January 12, 2022

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

From: Jan Leshner 
Acting County Administrator

Re: **Augmented COVID-19 testing capacity in response to the Omicron surge**

Pima County was one of the first jurisdictional entities to build COVID-19 testing capabilities in response to the scarce laboratory capacity at the beginning of the pandemic. Since March of 2020 more than 2.5 million diagnostic tests have been performed in this community by Pima County and its many clinical partners. This situation has evolved significantly, however, and we have seen the addition of a myriad of testing providers and locations beyond those initially operated by the County or its contractors. More than 88 retail pharmacies, urgent care settings, community health centers, medical offices as well as on-line vendors now offer options for COVID-19 testing.

The Omicron surge and federal messaging about the availability and utility of rapid antigen testing are again creating increased demand that is not easily accommodated by the existing local COVID-19 testing capacity. For this reason, the community is again looking to Pima County to provide low-barrier, no cost testing.

Test Capacity Expansion at County Affiliated/Coordinated Sites

Paradigm, Pima County's largest and longest serving vendor, has added substantial capacity in the last weeks. This has been achieved by increasing the number of days and hours for testing across its various County supported sites including an eastside Grant Road location, Liberty Plaza in the southwest, and downtown at Tucson Electric Power to deliver large volumes of antigen testing. Additionally, the Tucson International Airport location which performs PCR testing under an Arizona Department of Health Services contract, has recently been authorized for expansion to an Airport adjacent location on Plumer Avenue. In addition, Paradigm has indicated their ability to provide an additional 1000 PCR tests per day should that become necessary.

Ellie Towne Center hosts a testing site operated by Arizona State University and funded by the Arizona Department of Health Services. This site has also expanded its capacity and availability. At this time this site is performing on average 215 tests per day (but has the capacity for 360 tests per day).

Mobile "pop-up" clinics are designed to reach populations at greatest risk of infection, severe illness and death. Community-based mobile testing sites operated by the Pima County Health Department have targeted rural and hard to reach communities. In December these efforts in collaboration with community partners as diverse as Robles Ranch Community Center,

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Arivaca Fire Department, and Sopori Elementary School in Amado, reached at risk individuals. Additionally, Pima County will train Tohono O’odham nation staff to conduct supervised COVID-19 testing using the rapid antigen tests provided by the Health Department.

Finally, the Health Department continues to support schools directly and indirectly in an effort to keep students and staff in learning settings. The Test-to-Stay strategy released publically last week relies on schools and districts offering frequent testing to those individuals who have been exposed in the classroom. To support this critical effort, the Health Department has prioritized this testing need, and set aside the bulk of the current antigen testing inventory for this use. Earlier today the White House announced that it would be making 10 million tests available to schools across the country to facilitate the Test-to-Stay programs. Although this is extremely encouraging, at this time we do not know how many of those tests are destined for schools in Pima County or the timing of such a distribution.

New COVID-19 Testing Capacity

The Pima County Health Department’s request for a Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) operated, large, drive-through surge testing site was recently approved and will begin operating next week. This community test site will operate 6 days per week with extended hours and will be capable of processing approximately 1000 to 2000 PCR tests per day and will provide results in approximately 48-hours. The site will be situated and hosted collaboratively on the Pima Community College West Campus. (Attachment)

Premier Medical Group has been our principal contractor for vaccination. It has also provided testing in support of the Casa Alitas Welcoming Center, which assists with the federal response to asylum seekers, as well as intermittently at Pima County’s Abrams Health Center on Ajo Way under a State contract. This contractor is prepared to expand to cover a second 5-day per week community rapid antigen testing site at another, as yet undetermined, location.

Federally qualified community health centers have begun to be resourced by the federal government to distribute COVID-19 antigen testing in coordination with the Health Department. The first such entity was El Rio, which received an initial allocation of 13,500 tests. El Rio quickly placed these kits in the hands of their patients and staff, and provided 3000 to the Pima County Health Department for further community distribution (which was completed last week). Likewise, Marana Health Care last week received nearly 6750 antigen tests for use at their Flowing Wells, Catalina and Marana locations. Next week they are scheduled to a subsequent allocation, and they have set aside a considerable number for community distribution through the Pima County Health Department. Finally, Desert Senita in Ajo has a federal request in queue for nearly 2500 antigen tests for next week. United Community Health Center which serves the communities of Sahuarita, Green Valley and Vail has yet to receive their federal allotment.

In recent weeks the federal government through its pharmacy contractor – Walgreens-- has broadly expanded the availability of free COVID-19 testing. At this time free antigen testing is available at approximately 41 Walgreens retail locations in Pima County. All together these

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sites are providing in excess of 1000 tests per day. COVID-19 tests are accessed by making appointments on-site and on the Walgreens website. We are in communication with Walgreen's regional corporate leadership to continue to expand the availability of this resource in this community.

Recent Federal Action to Improve Test Availability

This week the White House took two actions to significantly increase the availability of COVID-19 testing across the country. The first occurred on Monday when the Biden Administration took action to ensure that Food and Drug Administration approved over-the-counter rapid antigen test were a covered benefit for insured individuals. Effective January 15, insurers (including Medicare and Medicaid) and health plans must cover up to 8 free tests each month per person. Perhaps more importantly the federal government recently announced the intent to create a centralized website accessible to the general public to facilitate the delivery of free rapid antigen tests directly to households. The details for this latter strategy are not yet available, but we will forward this information as soon as it is disclosed.

Planning for the future

In support of the plan as articulated above and at the current burn-rate, the additional \$3 million in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) resources reallocated by the Board in December will be expended by mid-February. At this time, we are reviewing other ARPA allocations to develop contingencies should more resources be required to support the COVID-19 testing function. Additionally, Pima County continues to actively pursue other federal funding and support opportunities to support the testing enterprise.

For the time being, however, we continue to aggressively procure testing materials and supplies through our existing suppliers (McKesson) as well as through additional vendors (including Stratus Point Global LLC.). As supply chains tighten, it will be critical to maintain adequate reserves of testing supplies and materials.

Pima County continues to review the physical layout of all our testing sites to ensure the health and safety of users as well as staff. This will continue to present a significant challenge since many of these locations where we find ourselves now delivering services were never meant to be used for clinical care. Likewise, the security posture of all our sites continues to be reviewed. Already resources are being provided to our contractors to support the security of all our sites.

JKL/mp

Attachments

c: Carmine DeBonis, Jr., Deputy County Administrator for Public Works
Francisco García, MD, MPH, Deputy County Administrator & Chief Medical Officer,
Health and Community Services
Terry Cullen, MD, Pima County Public Health Director

ATTACHMENT 1

Proposed Pima County Federal COVID-19 Surge Test Site

Objective

Pima County is requesting Federal and private support for surge in COVID-19 testing throughout the county with the assistance of AzDHS, FEMA and private contractors. The goal is to perform up to 2,000 tests daily at a high volume drive-through location in Pima County. The County/City will select locations, augment and support staff operations, provide logistical support, and store test items until courier arrives. The contracted test facilitator will be responsible for collection of samples and notification of results, with on-site resulting available if Antigen samples are collected.

Below is the identified location and plan of operation.

Location and Planned Dates of Operation

- Pima Community College West Campus Monday through Saturday, 0800-1800

Testing Site Plan

Address of site

- Pima Community College West Campus, 2202 W Anklam Rd Tucson, AZ 85709

Staffing support

- 2 Sheriff Auxiliary Volunteer for security / traffic management
- 4 Health Dept staff for site management
- 8 volunteers for supply running, registration, general support

Logistics needs

- Signage for entrance, exit, site check in, general messaging, safety
- Traffic cones for lane separation and check points
- 4 tents with tie down and shade for workers
- Large coolers for sample storage including Ice or plug in portable coolers
- 6 Tables; 12 chairs
- Hydration and nutritional supplements
- Auxiliary power / generator including power strips, extension cords and other cabling
- 4 Laptops, 2 mifi, 4 clipboards, pens, paper, 1 large monitor for self-administration instructions and potentially a printer
- First aid and car kit

Number of appointments per site

- 0-2000 tests estimate

Operating hours

- Monday – Saturday 0800 to 1800

Messaging and communications plan

Social media campaign on Facebook, Nextdoor, local radio, local media outlets. Communications office will be brought in to handle this piece.

Safety and Inclement weather plan

Given the time of year we may experience freezing temperatures and need to plan accordingly. Staff will be provided with dress codes and limited storage for personal effects. In the event of heavy rain or flooding, the county will work with Pima Community College, and public safety agencies for access to storage / safe space in the event of a severe weather.

A health department staff member will act as a safety officer to identify any issues that arise and ensure it is safe to operate. All volunteers will report to this person.

Our public safety liaison will work with the Pima Community College Public Safety Department to ensure security will be made available for any issues that arise.

Temperature checks and wellness screening will be mandatory for all staff reporting to the testing site. If there are irregularities the person will be retested after sitting in shade for 10 minutes. Persons with continued high temperatures will be asked to leave the premises.

Partners

Pima Community College Facilities Management
Pima Community College Public Safety Department
A La Carte Rentals
Hazardous Medical Waste Services

Testing Map with Ingress and Egress

- Pima Community College West Campus, 2202 W Anklem Rd Tucson, AZ 85709

