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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **Northeast Colorado Health Department (NCHD) Explains COVID-19 Testing Process**

Sterling, Colo. – August 20, 2020: People often have questions related to COVID-19 testing and the process behind it. Testing is a crucial part of treating and limiting the spread.

Symptoms of COVID-19 may appear between 2-14 days after exposure and we recommend that anyone with symptoms should get tested. There are three kinds of tests available for COVID-19: PCR, antigen and antibody tests. A PCR test, also known as a molecular-based test, tells you if you have a current infection but it is not useful in determining past exposure in fully recovered patients. Samples are collected from your respiratory system such as a nasal or a saliva sample, to see if you are currently infected with SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. An antigen test is similar to a rapid flu test. While antigen tests can be less expensive and offer quicker results, they are not as

sensitive as PCR tests. This means that a PCR test might be needed to confirm a negative antigen test.

An antibody test is a blood test that may tell you if you had a past infection, but might not show if you have a current infection because it can take two weeks after infection for your body to make antibodies. Scientists and public health professionals are still learning about COVID-19. Having antibodies to the virus that causes COVID-19 might provide protection from getting infected with the virus again, but this virus is new enough that it is unknown how much protection the antibodies might provide or how long this protection might last. Some antibody tests may cross react with other respiratory viruses resulting in false positive results. This means that the test has detected antibodies to a different virus such as one of the common coronaviruses that many people have been exposed to in the past.

Once you get tested, the tests are sent to a laboratory for analysis, a process that can take a few days. The length of time it takes to get your test results depends on the laboratory and the test used. In Colorado, some testing sites are sending tests to the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) laboratory and other sites send tests to a private lab for analysis. Some labs are experiencing a high demand for testing which can cause a delay in processing tests and providing results. To get your test results, check with the group that performed your test asking how you will be notified and how long it will take to get your test results.

NCHD is not conducting any testing but local healthcare providers and hospitals are doing so. However, testing resources are not equal at all facilities

across northeast Colorado. And while there are testing guidelines available, each facility may be testing different categories of people based on varying circumstances and availability of testing supplies. If you have symptoms of COVID-19 and want to get tested, call your healthcare provider first.

Typically, you will be notified by your healthcare provider or local health department of a positive COVID-19 test result. If notified of a positive test result, NCHD case specialists will then contact you to ask a series of questions about symptoms you are experiencing, timing of onset of symptoms, and other health history that may increase vulnerability to COVID-19 as well as travel or work related interactions with other people. You will also be provided appropriate guidance to monitor your symptoms and isolate. Occasionally, there have been cases where an individual has received conflicting test results and through case investigation NCHD staff are able to sort this out. Individuals who test positive are only included once in the cumulative case count regardless of how many different times they may end up being tested.

Recently, we have learned that scammers, claiming to be employees of the health department are either texting or calling residents asking for personal financial information. NCHD staff will never ask for immigration status, money, your financial information or social security number. Individual information is not shared and all information collected during interviews is used only to track the spread of the disease in order to take steps to prevent further transmission. Interviewers operate under strict confidentiality rules and collected data is protected in secure systems. Anyone asking for personal financial information is

a scammer. To report contact tracing scams please go to

[www.StopFraudColorado.com](http://www.StopFraudColorado.com) or call 1-800-222-4444.

Caring for yourself and helping protect others in your home and community is important. Staying home and monitoring your symptoms are the best way to do that. If your symptoms get worse, contact your doctor. If you must be around other people, you should wear a mask and clean your hands often. You can be around others after 10 days have elapsed since symptoms first appeared as long as your symptoms are improving and 24 hours with no fever without using any fever-reducing medications. If you tested positive for COVID-19 but had no symptoms you can be with others after 10 days have passed since you had a positive test for COVID-19.

A negative test result only means that you did not have COVID-19 at the time of the testing or that your sample was collected too early in your infection. We recommend waiting about five to seven days after a known exposure before asymptomatic people seek testing. It is also possible that you could be exposed to COVID-19 after the test. If you develop symptoms later, you may need another test to determine if you are infected with the virus that causes COVID-19. Whether you test positive or negative for COVID-19, you should take preventive measures to protect yourself and others.

If you have concerns about the tests, results, contact tracing or other questions, please visit the Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment website at <https://covid19.colorado.gov/are-you-sick/testing-for-covid-19>

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