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For Immediate Release

MCHD administers 1,000 free COVID-19 tests; all results negative

MORGANTOWN, WV (May 29, 2020) — The results are in with good news: Of the 1,000 free COVID-19 tests administered May 22 and 23 by Monongalia County Health Department and the West Virginia National Guard, all came back negative.

“We are happy that a variety of individuals came out for free testing and we are happy to report this outcome,” said Dr. Lee B. Smith, MCHD executive director and county health officer.

The testing, which took place at the Big Lots parking lot on May 22 and Mountainview Elementary and the WVU Coliseum on May 23, was done in accordance with an order from Gov. Jim Justice to provide free COVID-19 testing in specific counties to vulnerable populations, including minorities and those with special needs and/or without primary health care providers.

Of the participants, 81.5% identified as white; 8.2% identified as black or African-American; 5.3% identified as Asian; 2.1% identified as multi-ethnic; 1.8% identified as Hispanic and in 1.1% of the tests, that information was not given.

In terms of age ranges, 22.1% of the individuals were between the ages of 60 and 69, the highest percentage of any age range. In a statistical dead heat were three other age categories: 20-29, 14.7%; 70-79, 14.6% and 50-59, 14.1%.

Individuals ages 40-49 were the next highest group at 12.4%; those ages 30-39 represented 11.3% of those tested.

The remaining age groups of those tested were 80-89, 3.8%; 10-19, 3.5%; 0-9, 2.1% and 90-plus, 0.8%. Five individuals, or 0.5%, did not provide an age.

Testing was organized with a week’s notice and was pulled off with 42 individuals on May 22 at one location and 63 individuals at two locations on May 23. That breakdown for May 22 is as follows: MCHD staff, 13; West Virginia National Guardsmen currently housed at MCHD, four; additional West Virginia National Guardsmen, 18; and seven volunteers

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For May 23, the breakdown is: MCHD staff, 16; West Virginia National Guardsmen currently housed at MCHD, four; additional West Virginia National Guardsmen, 27; and 16 volunteers.

As of May 28, Monongalia County has had 121 positive COVID-19 cases and five deaths, all related to a nursing home outbreak. The county was placed on the state's "hotspot" list in April because of an increasing number of diagnosed cases. This limited public outdoor gatherings to no more than five individuals in one location. That was lifted as of May 21 and now gatherings are limited to 25 or fewer people, just like other counties in the state.

"We are very pleased with these negative test results, but people still need to be aware that we still have COVID-19 in the county and that everyone should exercise the proper precautions to avoid getting it," Dr. Smith said.

Those precautions include wearing a mask in public, maintaining a social distance of six feet from others and washing hands frequently for 20 seconds with warm water and soap.

Monongalia County continues to open back up under Gov. Justice's plan, The Comeback, but a spike in COVID-19 cases could result in a reversal of some of those trends.

"If we see increasing number of COVID-19 cases, then commerce may slow, halt or return to closure of all but essential services," Dr. Smith said. "We are dependent upon everyone's cooperation to prevent a rise in the number of positive cases. Everyone in our county is in this together. We need to be reasonable in our decision making and remember that it is our actions that will determine how quickly things open up."

As of May 4, the state has been under a "Safer at Home" order that lifts the restrictions of the March 24 "Stay at Home" order, in which residents were asked to only go out for essential jobs or essential errands.

"But at least 1 in 4 individuals with COVID-19 do not have symptoms, which can include fever, dry cough and trouble breathing," Dr. Smith said. "Also, individuals with COVID-19 can shed the virus, and therefore spread the illness, before they develop symptoms. So, we really want to emphasize that people should be cautious when they are out and about."

MCHD is examining opportunities for additional testing, especially in vulnerable populations.

This weekend marks day 70 for MCHD's response. Dr. Smith expressed his appreciation for the unsung heroes of public health. These include first responders, first receivers, the West Virginia National Guard, Monongalia County Commissioners, the justice system, Monongalia County Sheriff's Office, politicians, emergency management, hospital staff and management, peer recovery coaches and everyone who has been on the front lines or in support of this response.

"It has been a team effort, and we at the health department want to thank everyone who has provided assistance to us," Dr. Smith said.

Links to orders issued by the governor as well as Monongalia County Health Department can be found at monchd.org/covid-19.html.

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