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For Immediate Release

MCHD to hold free COVID testing on Wednesdays at WVU Rec Center

MORGANTOWN, WV (Sept. 21, 2020) — Once again, free community COVID-19 testing coordinated by Monongalia County Health Department will be held from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. this Wednesday, Sept. 23 at the WVU Rec Center.

Additionally, in an effort to continue to get a better idea of the amount of COVID-19 in Monongalia County, testing will be held every Wednesday at the Rec Center for the foreseeable future, noted Dr. Lee B. Smith, MCHD executive director and county health officer.

“We’re going to continue to offer free, weekly community COVID-19 testing until we get a better grasp of the COVID-19 situation,” Dr. Smith said. “And because up to 40% of individuals with COVID-19 do not display symptoms, this will help us find some of those people and give them the opportunity to quarantine to avoid passing the virus on to others.”

Monongalia County Health Department has administered a total of 1,061 free community COVID-19 in the past eight days — 571 at Mylan Park on Sept. 13 and 490 at WVU Rec Center on Sept. 18.

The WVU Rec Center has been set up to accommodate both WVU and community COVID-19 testing in a safe and socially-distanced manner. Members of the community will enter the Rec Center from the larger parking, where parking will be free. As they walk in, they will stay in the right lane in order to go to the correct room where testing is taking place.

Everyone needs to wear a mask and bring identification.

“People should have no concerns about the walk-in testing,” Dr. Smith said. “The room where this takes place is very spacious. Last week, we saw a steady stream of individuals who arrived for testing, but there were never any crowds. When there were lines, everyone was socially distanced and the lines moved very quickly.”

In fact, comments posted to MCHD’s social media complimented the process. “Thank you! We went today and it was very efficient,” said one poster.

“Just had this done, painless and fast... no wait at all,” said another.

Wednesdays have been selected as the weekly test day because it’s a day in which the WVU Rec Center can accommodate it.

Also, “It takes quite an effort to set up new testing in different spaces on a regular basis,” Dr. Smith said. “This is a location that is familiar to many in Morgantown and it offers free parking.”

MCHD has offered free testing on both weekdays and weekends previously, Dr. Smith added. However, weekend testing takes a toll on the public health workers, who have their regular health department duties that they must continue to perform.

“Especially as flu season approaches, our public health workers need to tend to their everyday tasks,” Dr. Smith said. “Plus, our registered sanitarians not only have to respond to COVID complaints, but they also must inspect restaurants, hotels, motels, child care facilities, tattoo studios and a host of other establishments.

“And we also operate a full-service dental office five days a week.”

On future testing days, there might be extended hours so that individuals who work until late afternoon would be able to stop by the WVU Rec Center on their way home in order to be tested, Dr. Smith added.

Unlike in the past, individuals are only being told to quarantine after a COVID-19 test if they have symptoms and/or have a known COVID-19 exposure. Those who don’t have symptoms and no known COVID exposure who are just being tested out of curiosity or concern do not need to quarantine, although they should still wear a mask and practice social distancing, as everyone should.

“We understand it’s not realistic for everyone to take time off from work in order to quarantine after a test,” Dr. Smith said. “We are changing to a mindset that in order to find individuals with COVID, we must move to a model that allows for more testing. We hope businesses will follow suit and not demand that employees quarantine after a test unless they have symptoms or a known exposure.”

By insisting that only symptomatic individuals who get tested can be reimbursed, the insurance companies have kept asymptomatic people from getting tested, Dr. Smith added. “We’re trying to change that narrative to where everyone understands that they can be tested. This will help drive the COVID-19 numbers down by identifying as many infected people as possible so they can quarantine and avoid passing the virus on to others.”

This will be the seventh free day of community testing held by MCHD in the past four months. Individuals will undergo nasal swab tests that will be processed by Q-Labs.

“The reason free testing is so important is that we need to understand clearly how much COVID exists in Monongalia County,” Dr. Smith said. “People can be either symptomatic or asymptomatic and we want to break the chain of infection. Those who test positive can then self-isolate and help stop the spread.”

COVID-19 symptoms can include fever or chills, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fatigue, muscle aches, headache, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, sore throat, new loss of taste and/or smell and congestion or runny nose.

This testing is being done in conjunction with the West Virginia National Guard and West Virginia University.

On Monday, Monongalia County had a total of 1,902 cases since the beginning of the pandemic six months ago. Monongalia County only had 162 COVID-19 cases as of June 30, but surges in July and again this month have made those numbers spike.

For up-to-date information on health and wellness in Monongalia County, check out monchd.org and follow the health department on Facebook and Twitter @WVMCHD and on Instagram at #wvmchd. COVID-19 information can be found under the “Preparedness” tab.