

This morning, the Joint COVID-19 Response Legislative Workgroup met for a discussion with the health officers for Montgomery, Howard, and Anne Arundel Counties. Other county health officers were invited to participate but were unavailable due to scheduling challenges.

Anne Arundel County Health Officer Dr. Niles Kalyanaraman stated that the County is trying to get their COVID-19 positivity rate under 10% and closer to 3%. Currently, the county rate is around 15. The County is testing 7 days a week, including doing walk-up testing in various communities, especially communities of color due to their higher infection rates. Testing capacity is increasing, as the County will receive an additional 500 tests per week from the Maryland Department of Health. The County has set a goal of testing 2% of its population each week. Right now, they have 3,000 COVID-19 positive cases and have contact traced each one. The County has 101 people doing contact tracing, but they are trying to hire more people using CARES dollars. The key to contact tracing is case management. The County will use its own system to handle more complicated cases. Easier cases will be kicked out to the state contact tracing case management system.

Montgomery County Health Officer Dr. Travis Gayles stated that the County is tracing about 60% of their COVID-19 positive cases, with prioritization on nursing home settings, pediatric centers, vulnerable communities, and first responders. The County is utilizing VEIP facilities for testing as well as community centers like recreational centers. The County is finding that some people do not have access to a medical provider to get the needed referral for testing, so they came up with a call center where people can get screened and then referred to the testing sites in the County. They are also creating a mobile testing arm that is able to do pop-up testing sites. Moreover, teams have been going out and working with community partners to find people who need testing and doing testing in their homes. The County would like to change the testing criteria so that asymptomatic people and essential employees are tested. The County is working with George Washington University and the University of Maryland on ways to improve their processes and to provide data more readily. The County has a goal to test 5% of their population on a monthly basis.

Howard County Health Officer Dr. Maura Rossman explained that the County is using its VEIP site for COVID-19 testing, but also has a hospital that has its tent open 5 days a week for testing. In addition, they have two urgent care centers where residents can go for viral diagnostic COVID-19 testing at no cost. The local health department is limited to 200 staff, so they are continuing to explore further public-private partnerships to expand capacity. In terms of contact tracing, the County is working with the state platform and will come onboard next week. A number of local residents and organizations have donated PPE that is being provided to a prioritized list that includes primary care providers.

Following a question from Senate President Ferguson relating to differing approaches from county health departments, all participants affirmed that despite differences and nuances, they are in frequent conversation with each other as well as their state colleagues and officials in Northern Virginia and Washington, DC.

Other COVID-19 Updates:

1. This [executive order](#) from Governor Hogan authorizes testing by pharmacists.
2. Governor Hogan [announces](#) testing now available for individuals who are not displaying any symptoms for the novel coronavirus.