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News Release

UW System to lead massive surge testing effort for Wisconsin

Federal push is first using Abbott BinaxNOW COVID-19 tests

MADISON, Wis.—University of Wisconsin (UW) System campuses, in partnership with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), will serve as the first "surge testing" sites for a new rapid-results COVID-19 test available to members of the community, UW System President Tommy Thompson announced today.

The 250,000 Abbot BinaxNOW tests provided by HHS amplify the System's robust testing program for students and will assist in identifying people who may have the novel coronavirus, Thompson said.

"Our universities are perfectly positioned to help Wisconsin combat the spread of COVID-19," Thompson said. "This is the Wisconsin Idea in action, and a recognition of our existing work to keep our students, faculty, and staff as safe as possible during the pandemic.

"This surge testing plan is a terrific example of cooperation by federal, state, and local governments to urgently respond to the outbreak and that UW System is pleased to lead."

It is the first time a federal surge testing operation will use Abbott BinaxNOW rapid point-of-care tests that provide a result within 15 minutes. Federal surge testing provides additional temporary federal support to areas that have seen a recent spike in coronavirus cases.

"The Trump Administration is standing up surge testing sites to support areas hard hit by COVID-19. Surge testing is one of many tools the federal government can deploy to assist local leadership to reduce community spread of the virus, and receiving a COVID-19 test result within 15 minutes from the BinaxNOW will help identify those who may be infected so we can protect others from the virus," said HHS Assistant Secretary for Health Adm. Brett Giroir, M.D. "The intent of surge testing efforts is to help local, state, and federal public health experts identify new cases, including those that may be asymptomatic or mildly symptomatic."

The federal government purchased Abbott BinaxNOW diagnostic tests on August 27 to ensure equitable distribution of the first 150 million units – one day after an Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) was issued by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

"Testing is a critical component in our battle against COVID-19," said Surgeon General Dr. Jerome Adams. "Not everyone develops symptoms, so someone could be spreading the virus without knowing it. If you or your loved ones are worried you may have come into contact with COVID-19, please make an appointment to get tested. It's easy and most importantly – free! Please also continue to do your part to stop the spread of COVID-19 by following the three Ws: wear a mask, wash your hands, and watch your distance. We owe this to our community and our friends and family members to protect them."

Campuses are currently establishing testing sites with medical support provided by eTrueNorth under contract with the federal government. Some sites will open as early as this week. Testing will be available at no cost. Individuals do not have to be experiencing symptoms or be a close contact of someone with COVID-19 to get a test, nor do they need to live in the community where the testing site is located.

Individuals seeking to be tested will register online, proceed to the testing site, administer the test themselves under supervision, and label it for processing.

Register for a free test at www.doineedacovid19test.com. Participants will also retrieve results by logging into this portal after receiving an email that informs them that their results are ready.

The state Department of Health Services will be supplying an additional 30,000 PCR tests as part of the effort. Individuals who test negative using the BinaxNOW test but also are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 or who test positive but do not have symptoms are urged to get a confirmatory PCR test.

UW System's partnership with HHS complements its ongoing partnership with Gov. Tony Evers and the Wisconsin Department of Health Services, which is separately helping supply 350,000 COVID-19 tests to the UW System.

"This new initiative represents the continued commitment from both the Trump and Evers administrations to help our campuses and campus communities battle the pandemic," said Regent President Andrew S. Petersen. "We're grateful for the opportunity to expand our testing as we build a culture of responsibility among students and seek to maintain safety for students, employees, and the community."

The University of Wisconsin System serves approximately 170,000 students. Awarding nearly 37,000 degrees annually, the UW System is Wisconsin's talent pipeline, putting graduates in position to increase their earning power, contribute to their communities, and make Wisconsin a better place to live. Nearly 90 percent of in-state UW System graduates stay in Wisconsin five years after earning a degree. The UW System provides a 23:1 return on state investment. UW System institutions also contribute to the richness of Wisconsin's culture and economy with groundbreaking research, new companies and patents, and boundless creative intellectual energy.

MEDIA CONTACT:
Mark Pitsch, UW System
608-265-3419
mpitsch@uwsa.edu
universityrelations@uwsa.edu