



# COUNTY OF MONTEREY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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Administration      Clinic Services      Public Health  
Behavioral Health      Emergency Medical Services      Public Administrator/Public Guardian  
Environmental Health/Animal Services

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## COVID-19 Testing at the Monterey County Public Health Laboratory

**updated 3/16/2020**

On Thursday, March 5, 2020, Monterey County Health Department's Public Health Laboratory received one test kit from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC's) International Reagent Resource (IRR). Information about what material were received from the IRR can be found on the CDC's webpage at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/lab/testing-laboratories.html>.

The Monterey County Public Health Laboratory staff completed the necessary quality assurance and control processes, tested their methodology and prepared to bring COVID-19 testing online the same day.

On Friday, March 6, the Monterey County Health Department received COVID-19 specimens from area hospitals and released results from their first batch of completed COVID-19 tests.

In light of reduced supplies of testing materials and in consultation with representatives from local hospitals, other Health Departments conducting COVID-19 testing, and subject matter experts from the California Department of Public Health, the Monterey County Health Department implemented a testing strategy designed to achieve the following goals:

1. Inform clinical decision-making processes on individuals severely ill with respiratory illnesses of unknown etiology and on individuals with underlying health conditions that make them at higher risk for severe COVID-19 disease.
2. Provide rapid results to local hospitals so that hospital staff can minimize unnecessary use of scarce personal protective equipment and airborne infection isolation rooms.
3. Screen individuals with signs and symptoms of COVID-19 who have either had high risk exposures or work in settings where they could potentially pass the disease to many individuals at high risk for severe COVID-19 disease. Because of the rapidly evolving situation worldwide, nationally, and in California, the definition of "high risk exposure" changes with the current known epidemiology of COVID-19.

The number of patients that can be screened with supplies from a CDC test kit varies with the number of specimens collected on each patient, the number of quality control tests performed to confirm results are accurate, and whether or not the run was completed with the maximum number of specimens allowed. It is also dependent on

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the availability of other supplies needed to support the testing process like pipettes and reagents. The Monterey County Public Health Laboratory expects to be able to test specimens from about 300 individuals with materials provided in the CDC test kit over the next few weeks until CDC testing supplies are depleted. Monterey County Public Health Laboratory can currently process 40 patient specimens per today. Specimens received from local medical providers by 10:00 am will be resulted in the afternoon of the same business day. Specimens received after 10:00 am will be resulted the next business day.

While testing at the Monterey County Public Health Laboratory is focused on specific populations at this time, as of March 16, medical providers who have symptomatic patients and are unable to safely collect respiratory specimens in their office may contact the Monterey County Health Department's Communicable Disease Unit to help facilitate testing in the Emergency Departments of Salinas Valley Memorial Hospital, Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula, and Natividad Medical Center. Once testing is approved by the Health Department, the medical provider works with the receiving hospital Emergency Department to safely direct the individual to the Emergency Department. Medical providers are asked not to send patients directly to the Emergency Departments without contacting both the Health Department and receiving facility first unless a health emergency exists.

Between January 21 and March 5, the Monterey County Public Health Laboratory facilitated testing for 10 individuals at the CDC and Santa Clara County Public Health Laboratory before receiving the CDC IRR test kit. Between March 6 and March 15, the Monterey County Public Health Laboratory completed testing in-house on specimens collected from 70 individuals. Specimens from an additional 16 individuals are pending in the Monterey County Public Health Laboratory. As of March 16, there are no laboratory-confirmed cases of COVID-19 among Monterey County residents.

The Monterey County Public Health Laboratory purchased additional materials to extend their testing capacity. Because the materials were not received in a kit from the CDC's IRR, the Monterey County Public Health Laboratory must undergo an extensive validation process and receive approval from federal licensing agencies to perform COVID-19 testing with these materials. That process is underway. Once completed, the Monterey County Public Health Laboratory expects to be able to test specimens from an additional 700 patients as soon as approval is received from federal licensing agencies.