



PRESS RELEASE

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Joint Information Center Explains Testing Process and Local Facility Cases

As our COVID-19 positive case count continues to increase in Washington County, the Joint Information Center (JIC) has worked to answer questions and address concerns about the impact of COVID-19 on our community. Washington County officials are engaged in daily communications with Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) to ensure information is shared in a timely and appropriate manner with the public.

Testing

As more cases of COVID-19 are reported around the world, medical advice about who should be tested for the coronavirus is constantly changing to reflect changing levels of risk for infection as well as the *limited* number of test kits available. Washington County nor the City of Brenham receive test kits. At present, it is noted that test results remain at roughly 70% accurate.

Can anyone be tested?

The answer right now, according to the CDC, is no. Because there is not an unlimited number of test kits available yet, only those that meet certain criteria, like having traveled somewhere with a high number of COVID-19 cases, having exposure to a confirmed case, or currently displaying *specific* symptoms, are prioritized.

Are antibody tests available?

Dozens of companies are working to develop antibody tests, as are researchers at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, but Washington County has not received or does not have information on when these tests will be available.

Keep in mind, along with so many other unknowns, if you test positive for SARS-CoV-2 antibodies, that usually means you've had COVID-19. But you may get a negative result if you've

only had the virus a short time. And it's possible to get exposed and not develop antibodies. You may also get a "false positive" which means you have antibodies but had a different kind of coronavirus.

What if someone has symptoms and still aren't tested?

COVID-19 symptoms include fever, cough, and difficulty breathing which are likely to develop between 2 and 14 days after exposure to the virus, according to the CDC. But, unfortunately, those are also symptoms of other common respiratory illnesses. Most hospitals and some urgent care centers can run a test for those and for some types of pneumonia. In most cases, results take a couple of hours. If those results are negative, then doctors might consider ordering a COVID-19 test. But before doing that, they will ask additional questions to determine how likely it is that you were exposed to the virus.

Once tested, what happens next?

For the general public, a doctor's note is typically required to be tested for COVID-19. Once the specimen is processed, the results are sent to the following:

- the physician that ordered the test
- DSHS
- Local health authority

For facilities such as retirement, assisted living, or nursing homes, it is common that the facility's Medical Director orders the test for those deemed necessary. Once the specimen is processed, the results are sent to the following:

- the facility's Medical Director and/or Director
- DSHS
- Local health authority

Case Reporting

Washington County officials receive a report from Texas Department of State Health Services listing any new positive cases and with limited information whether the reported case is from the general public or within a facility. The notification of a new positive case may be received several days after the person who tested positive is notified.

Local Facility and Positive COVID-19 Cases

Currently, Washington County has a residential care facility with multiple positive cases confirmed and six of the seven deaths within our community. Local health officials are in communication with both local and corporate representatives from this facility and have been since April 5, 2020 when the first case was reported. Personal protective equipment (PPE) assistance has been offered by local health officials but the facility's supplies were reported to be sufficient. The JIC Task Force,

local public health officials as well as DSHS, the facility's regulatory agency, Texas Health and Human Services, continue to be in communication with representatives from the facility.

Many in the community have concerns and questions of why the County and City aren't doing more, releasing more, or assisting more. Judge John Durrenberger states, "Neither Washington County nor the City of Brenham have oversight or jurisdiction in how resident care facilities operate; however, this does not mean it's a time to sit back and do nothing." He continues, "We, as a community, have proven we are all in this together and have demonstrated time and again the impact we can make in others' lives."

During this unusual time of so many unknowns, there is much to be done. "Although we may not be able to be as hands-on as we want to be in certain areas, there are many families and individuals to which we can extend our helping hand by: picking up groceries or prescriptions, making and delivering food to those less fortunate, offering a listening ear to the lonely and isolated, and so on," says Mayor Milton Tate. He adds, "The list of possibilities is endless."

Washington County and City of Brenham officials want to personally thank the 35,000+ Washington County residents that have diligently obeyed the CDC guidelines to reduce the spread in our community, noting it has made a significant difference.

Residents are encouraged to continue calling the COVID-19 Helpline at 979-337-8420 with questions or concerns.

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