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Regional Partnership Will Ramp Up Testing Capacity

Efforts by the North Coast Regional Testing Partnership will soon make it possible for nearly 9,000 COVID-19 tests to be administered and processed locally each month.

Thanks to a partnership between United Indian Health Services (UIHS), Del Norte and Humboldt counties, Humboldt State University (HSU) and Tribal communities, and a contract between the state and PerkinElmer—a global company that produces medical instruments, tests and software—ramped up testing is expected to be available starting this fall.

Through an agreement with the state, PerkinElmer will lend additional testing equipment to the county and guarantee an unlimited supply of state-purchased reagents (a substance or mixture used for chemical analysis which is needed to process tests), and the county in turn will guarantee that it will have the operations in place to process the thousands of tests a month.

Humboldt County Public Health Laboratory Manager Jeremy Corrigan said Public Health's lab does not have the space necessary for the additional testing equipment, and so looked to UIHS's Arcata lab to partner in the effort. "I'll be working with UIHS's lab manager to help set up the new equipment, train staff and become operational."

HSU donated a biosafety cabinet to be housed at the UIHS location and is creating an internship program for students to work in the lab.

Once up and running, tests collected in Humboldt and Del Norte counties will be processed at either the Public Health or UIHS lab, but each county will be responsible for designing its own collection system and tribal partners will be aiding in designing and operating those systems.

"The goal is to ensure that all residents are able to access testing, particularly residents who are often underserved," Corrigan said. "Very importantly, this new asset provides a second, locally controlled laboratory in our region for COVID-testing stability and provides extra throughput and capacity for Del Norte, Humboldt and United Indian Health Services."

UIHS Chief Executive Officer John Reeves said his agency has provided health care to the American Indian and Alaskan Native residents of Humboldt and Del Norte counties for the past 50 years. "We have over the past two years worked diligently on expanding the laboratory capabilities of UIHS, and when approached about the possibility of partnership it became clear to us that our

efforts could aid in bridging the gaps beyond Indian Country,” he said. “We look forward to assisting both Humboldt and Del Norte counties’ strategy of increasing the testing capacity for all residents, and we appreciate their willingness to collaborate ensuring that the care for our people is not forgotten.”

Del Norte County Public Health Officer Dr. Warren Rehwaldt said the partnership will benefit the involved counties and tribes. "There are very few places in the country where two counties, a state university and a health clinic that serves nine tribes could work together this fast and this seamlessly to put together something this big, that really will help us all."

Humboldt County Health Officer Dr. Teresa Frankovich echoed Reeves’ and Rehwaldt’s sentiments. Remote, rural communities often have fewer material resources but robust connections between community partners, she said. “This unprecedented partnership between the tribes, Humboldt and Del Norte counties, greatly enhances our ability to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic in our region. This is what can be accomplished when we build upon each other’s strengths and share resources.”

Humboldt County COVID-19 Data Dashboard: humboldt.gov/dashboard,

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