

OVERVIEW OF WISCONSIN'S COVID-19 TESTING PLAN

For Nursing Homes and Intermediate Care Facilities for
Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities (ICF/IIDs)

The Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) is implementing a plan to provide COVID-19 testing to all residents and staff within nursing homes and Intermediate Care Facilities for Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities (ICF/IIDs). DHS and local health departments are directly contacting nursing homes and ICF/IIDs to provide additional details and to secure their commitment to participate.

WHY FACILITY-WIDE TESTING?

DHS has developed a plan for facility-wide testing of all residents and staff in nursing homes and ICF/IIDs because growing evidence suggests that persons with COVID-19 become infectious days prior to developing symptoms and can be infectious even if they develop only mild symptoms or no symptoms at all. Facility-wide testing allows for the identification of silent (asymptomatic) infections early to limit the spread of COVID-19. This is especially important in nursing homes and ICF/IIDs as residents are at a higher risk of serious illness or death due to COVID-19.

IS TESTING MANDATORY?

Asymptomatic testing is voluntary but highly recommended. The decision to be tested is at the discretion of the individual staff member and resident (or resident's representative). Staff and residents will be notified about the availability of testing and given information and the opportunity to ask questions. Those who are interested in participating must consent to be tested.

HOW WILL FACILITY-WIDE TESTING BE COMPLETED?

Testing may be implemented differently in each nursing home and ICF/IID depending on the facility's capacity, preference, and need:

- Facilities with sufficient staffing, supplies and equipment, and an existing relationship with a laboratory may choose to implement their own testing program. DHS will support these facilities as needed with training, guidance, and technical assistance.
- In some jurisdictions, the Local Health Department (LHD) may also have the capacity to implement a testing program at the facility utilizing local public health nurses or other staff, or helping to secure necessary supplies.
- Facilities may be able to implement a testing program in partnership with other health care providers. Local hospitals and clinics may be able to lend personnel, supplies, equipment, or laboratory capacity to help administer tests.
- Community paramedics, local EMS or fire department staff may also be able to be trained to administer tests for facilities which lack adequate staffing, but have necessary supplies and equipment and an existing relationship with a laboratory.
- Corporate-owned facilities may be able to implement a joint testing program with their sister facilities by pooling resources to ensure sufficient staffing, supplies, equipment, and laboratory capacity.
- Facilities are encouraged to explore other local resources that may be available before submitting a request for support from the National Guard. This helps ensure that National Guard resources remain available for community testing and outbreak response efforts. If other local resources are unable to assist, facilities without capacity for testing can receive support from the Wisconsin National Guard (WING), which is capable of fully implementing a testing program on behalf of a facility. Facilities that have some, but not full, capacity can also request WING assistance to fulfill specific roles, but should only request assistance needed to augment existing capacity. Facilities requesting WING support do not need to order their own test supplies.



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DHS and local health departments will work with nursing homes and ICF/IIDs to determine the testing model that is most appropriate for the facility.

DHS has also partnered with Exact Sciences, a Wisconsin-based diagnostic laboratory company, to support facility-wide COVID-19 testing at nursing homes and ICF/IIDs. Facilities can work with DHS and Exact Sciences to receive testing supplies, courier service, and other support at no cost to implement facility-wide testing. More information is available on the DHS website.

WHAT ABOUT RETESTING?

Testing only provides information for a given point in time, and a negative test result only indicates that an individual did not have detectable material from the virus present at the time of testing. Therefore, DHS and local health departments will work with nursing homes and ICF/IIDs to develop retesting plans to continue to identify infections early and limit the spread of COVID-19.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Facilities and other partners who are interested in more information about Wisconsin's COVID-19 testing plan for nursing homes and ICF/IIDs can visit www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/covid-19/ltc.htm.

