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August 7, 2020

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Low-barrier COVID-19 testing to expand Whatcom County Health Department, Whatcom Unified Command partner to provide

BELLINGHAM, WA – Beginning Monday August 10, the Whatcom County Health Department (WCHD) and Whatcom Unified Command (WUC) will start field testing a low-barrier, mobile COVID-19 testing model. Fully operational mobile testing is expected to begin within two weeks thereafter at locations throughout Whatcom County.

The new mobile COVID-19 testing will use an online scheduling system that allows users to register in advance for an appointment time. Registration will offer shorter and more predictable wait times than the model piloted by WCHD and WUC last month when some experienced wait times of 2-3 hours to be tested. With this testing model, the expected wait time is only 5-15 minutes.

Following pilot testing of the new scheduling system, WUC and WCHD will provide mobile testing Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays. Details, including specific addresses and hours of operation, are currently being finalized; however, WUC and WCHD have committed to testing five days a week at varying locations throughout the county, including one site within each school district of Whatcom County. The new model will allow for up to 320 people to be tested each day.

People tested at the new testing sites will also be automatically notified when their test results are available and can access results through an online portal within minutes of the test being processed. It will still take up to 24-72 hours from the time of specimen collection for tests to be processed by the laboratory.

Those without access to the internet may schedule a testing appointment by phone between 8:30 a.m. and 4:00 p.m., seven days a week. This new, dedicated testing access line will be staffed by trained WUC volunteers.

More details about testing locations, hours, and the registration process will be provided in announcements in the coming weeks.

The new mobile testing option is the result of extensive work following the two weekends of a low-barrier, drive-through pilot testing program offered at Civic Field in Bellingham in July. The pilot format - which couldn't accommodate online scheduling, required staff for 328 worker shifts

and took up to 72 hours for results - made it clear that method of testing would be unsustainable.

Anyone can get tested for COVID-19 at the new low-barrier sites. Low-barrier means no healthcare provider referral is required, and individuals can be tested without first visiting their regular provider. There will be no cost to those being tested at the WCHD/WUC mobile locations.

Whatcom County residents are also encouraged to continue to visit their regular healthcare providers for COVID-19 testing, which is also provided at no cost, including waived co-pays and deductibles, under a provision by the Washington State Insurance Commissioner.

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