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Mayor De Blasio, NYC Health + Hospitals And Bioreference Laboratories Announce Expanded Capacity To Allow 5,000 Daily COVID-19 Tests

March 17, 2020

New Yorkers should text COVID to 692-692 to get regular updates on the latest developments regarding COVID-19; Text COVIDESP to 692-692 for updates in Spanish

NEW YORK – Mayor de Blasio announced today that beginning Thursday, March 19th, NYC Health + Hospitals will expand their COVID-19 testing capacity by 5,000 tests per day through a partnership with OPKO Health's BioReference Laboratories. Under the agreement reached last night, NYC Health + Hospitals will begin sending tests to BioReference by Thursday. Results will be produced within 1-2 days, halving the current pace of turnaround from private reference labs.

"This expanded testing for H+H is critical to protecting the New Yorkers most at risk in this epidemic, especially people with chronic health conditions," said **Mayor Bill de Blasio**. "The new partnership between H+H and BioReference will get us the increased testing and faster results helping save lives."

"In support of the public health system as they provide healthcare to vulnerable and at-risk populations, BioReference is committed to prioritizing hospital patients suspected of COVID-19 infections and aid front-line physicians and healthcare providers to quickly and efficiently diagnose patients," said **Jon R. Cohen, M.D., Executive Chairman of BioReference Laboratories**. "In addition to the drive-through facilities, this collaboration is yet another example of how the private sector can assist with government agencies to help combat this epidemic."

Testing will be prioritized for those with serious illness at hospitals and health care facilities across NYC Health + Hospitals, frontline health care personnel and first responders. Those with mild illness should continue to stay home, practice social distancing, and consult their health care provider if their symptoms do not subside in 3-4 days.

Today, NYC Emergency Management sent Wireless Emergency Alerts to every cell phone in New York City in English and Spanish, asking every New Yorker to text COVID or COVIDESP (for Spanish alerts) to 692-692 to receive the latest developments around COVID-19 and City services and resources.

The City is also making robocalls to vulnerable New Yorkers who may not have cell phones, including seniors, NYCHA residents and others.

Ban on Pool Rides in For-Hire Vehicles

To protect the safety of drivers and passengers, the Mayor signed an Executive Order temporarily banning pooled rides in TLC-licensed high volume (Uber, Lyft, and Via) for-hire vehicles. This ban will not apply to paratransit vehicles.

Alternate Side Parking

Effective tomorrow, Alternate Side Parking (ASP) citywide will be suspended for one week, which may be extended based on street cleanliness and workforce availability. Any New Yorker under isolation who has received a ticket can appeal to the Department of Finance and should provide medical documentation or testimony, which will be taken into consideration when their case is reviewed. For additional questions call 311.

Medical Reserve Corps

The City will mobilize the NYC Medical Reserve Corps, a group of over 9,000 healthcare workers who volunteer to support NYC in emergency response. This includes physicians, nurses, mental health professionals, social workers, and many others, both retired and currently working in the health care system.

Emergency Services

Under the current State of Emergency, Agency Commissioners can ask nonprofit vendors with health and human service contracts to perform services in response to COVID-19. The City will also designate its health and service nonprofit workforce – an estimated 40,000 employees – as essential workers.

Tax Updates for Business Owners

Businesses should pay their taxes on time.

For any businesses, experiencing hardships directly related to COVID-19, the Mayor has directed the Commissioner of Finance to waive penalties.

Emergency Executive Order

Yesterday, Mayor Bill de Blasio signed an Emergency Executive Order to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and keep New Yorkers safe. The Order will require all hospitals and ambulatory service centers, at their discretion, to cancel elective surgeries. Combined with discharging patients early and creating additional capacity, the City will increase available hospital beds by 7,000 citywide.

The Mayor's Executive Order, signed yesterday, will:

- Suspend all elective surgeries at all hospitals and ambulatory service centers across the city within 96 hours. Hospitals will retain the discretion to determine what is elective/ non-elective based on patient risk.
- Suspend local procurement laws to make it easier for the City to obtain emergency goods and services.
- Postpone the Queens Borough president election to a date later this year. Any vote cast early or by absentee ballot will not count and voting will start over.

- Suspend the requirement that the Council meet twice per month and extend the Council's requirement to publish preliminary budget findings past the current deadline of March 25th.
- Suspend the timeline for public hearings, application submissions, and City Council approvals and voting for the duration of the emergency.
- Limit restaurants, bars, cafes, and catering halls to pick up and delivery food service only, effective Monday, March 16 at 8 PM.
- Enforce the closure of all entertainment venues, including movie theatres, museums, cinemas, clubs, and concert venues, effective Monday, March 16th at 8:00 PM.
- Close commercial gyms, effective Monday, March 16th at 8:00 PM.
- Close all publicly and privately owned senior centers. Centers will continue to operate to the extent necessary to prepare and distribute meals to older New Yorkers.
- The Department of Correction will suspend in-person visitation beginning Wednesday, March 18th. For the first time, the City is also working to implement a televisit initiative that will allow people contacting detainees the convenience of using their own personal PC or mobile device to complete the teleconference.

Hospital Capacity

The City will create approximately 1,300 hospital beds through the conversion of four buildings into temporary hospital space. These include the NYC Health + Hospitals/ Coler on Roosevelt Island, which will bring an additional 350 beds online by the end of the week. Additional facilities include a nursing home facility in the East New York neighborhood of Brooklyn (600) beds, and Westchester Square Hospital in the Bronx (150), and North Central Bronx Hospital (120).

The City will also take over space in five small hotels, freeing up 250 hotel rooms to be converted into hospital facilities. Eleven tents have also been purchased to be converted into temporary facilities, and the City has placed an order for an additional 10-20 tents, as well.

Drive-Thru Testing Sites.

Through a partnership with FEMA, the City will establish five drive-thru testing sites across all five boroughs.

Price Gouging

The Emergency Rule, effective yesterday, bans any price increase of 10 percent or more on personal and household goods and services that aid in diagnosing or monitoring disease symptoms, preventing the spread of disease, or treating disease. These goods include:

- Thermometers
- Sanitizing or baby wipes
- Paper towels
- Latex gloves
- Face masks
- Fever reducers
- Cough suppressants
- Aloe Vera
- Zinc oxide supplements
- Facial tissue
- Toilet Paper
- Rubbing Alcohol

This follows DCWP's previous declaration that facemasks, hand sanitizer, and disinfectant wipes are in short supply and expands the Agency's ability to protect New Yorkers from price gouging.

The Rule lasts 60 days, and can be renewed once for an additional 60 days. After 60 days, DCA must start the normal rulemaking process for the rule to remain in effect. Businesses caught violating the rule can incur a fine.

Deferring Non-Emergency Water Repairs

To ensure uninterrupted water service during the City's State of Emergency, DEP is suspending water service shut-offs, water main shutdowns, and water meter replacements until further notice. Emergency repairs will continue as needed.

Update from the Department of Education

The deadline to submit pre-K applications has been extended to March 29th. Families can apply both online, 24 hours a day, via MySchools or via phone at 718-935-2009 between the hours of 8:00 AM-6:00 PM Monday-Friday. Additional questions about applications should be directed to the above phone line or to ESEnrollment@schools.nyc.gov.

Update on the City's Evictions Moratorium

The City remains focused on preventing the displacement of New Yorkers facing sudden financial hardship due to COVID-19. With State Courts now closed for business, tenants do not have to worry about attending in-person appointments or appearances related to evictions at this time. The temporary moratorium on evictions in New York City will continue indefinitely, suspending the issuance of new eviction warrants.

Update from the Department of Buildings

Over the weekend, the Department of Buildings sent an industry-wide notification to contractors and construction professionals in New York City, advising them to take all necessary precautions on construction sites to protect their workers and the public, and special care in following DOHMH guidance to limit the spread of COVID-19.

In the event a construction site is closed down by contractors for a prolonged period of time due to illness, cleaning, or merely as a precaution, contractors should first inform the Department by sending an email to COVID-19@buildings.nyc.gov, and take appropriate measures to properly secure the site. Construction sites closed for a prolonged period of time can themselves pose a hazard if proper maintenance is ignored.

Nearly 400,000 New Yorkers have signed up for the City's COVID text notification system to get regular updates on the latest developments with coronavirus in New York City text COVID to 692-692. New Yorkers can text COVIDESP to 692-692 for updates in Spanish. You will receive regular SMS texts with the latest news and developments. If you have any questions on finding medical care call 311.

pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov

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