



COMMONWEALTH OF THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
COMMONWEALTH HEALTHCARE CORPORATION
GOVERNOR'S COVID-19 TASK FORCE



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CNMI acquires 60,000 COVID-19 test kits; receives first 20,000

Governor Ralph DLG. Torres, the Governor's COVID-19 Task Force, and the Commonwealth Healthcare Corporation (CHCC) announced on Tuesday that the CNMI has received the first 20,000 COVID-19 test kits that it purchased from South Korea.

The CNMI is set to receive a total of 60,000 test kits within the next week and will soon be able to conduct on-island COVID-19 testing based on testing strategy guidelines from the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

"We have been working on getting these test kits here for the last three weeks, and we are glad to have the first 20,000 here on Saipan. We have an additional 40,000 coming in this week to bring our total number to about 60,000 testing kits. CHCC will be working on getting these test kits ready to begin testing by the end of this week or early next week," said Governor Torres.

The Governor's COVID-19 Task Force coordinated the delivery via direct charter flight from South Korea to Saipan. Along with the test kits, a clinical pathologist from South Korea also arrived on island to perform equipment calibration and to test quality assurance and quality control of the test kits.

"I want to thank our CHCC CEO Esther Muña for her leadership, as well as our Task Force Chairman Warren Villagomez, our Governor's Authorized Representative Patrick Guerrero, Senate President Victor B. Hocog, Speaker Blas Jonathan T. Attao, and the Legislature leadership for assisting us in getting this done," the Governor added.

Since the increase in COVID-19 cases within the Pacific, the Governor's COVID-19 Task Force and CHCC have been working tirelessly toward a laboratory testing strategy, which will not only provide on-island strategic testing capabilities, but also ensure that these testing strategies are sustainable within the CNMI by CHCC's credentialed laboratory staff.

"I would like the public to know that there are several testing methodologies: point of care and laboratory-based testing," said CHCC CEO Muña.

"Currently COVID-19 testing technologies are all laboratory-based PCR, which requires an environment that maintains appropriate quality controls to reduce any false positive or false negative results," she noted.

PCR stands for Polymerase Chain Reaction. It is a fast and inexpensive technique to amplify small segments of DNA so they can be used to detect viruses such as COVID-19 in a short time frame. The 20,000 test kits that arrived last night are the DiaPlexQ (PCR) Novel Coronavirus Detection Kit from SolGent in South Korea. SolGent recently shipped 150,000 of these test kits to the United

States over the weekend. Approximately 750,000 COVID-19 test kits from South Korea are being delivered to the United States.

Governor Torres and CNMI leadership have been cognizant of South Korea's decline in new cases due to their early testing efforts to "flatten the curve." Governor Torres then pushed forward plans to purchase the test kits for the CNMI three weeks ago.

Since the Governor's Public Health Emergency declaration, CHCC has been scaling up its testing capabilities to include the following laboratory-based testing platforms:

- GeneXpert
- BioFire
- ABI 7500 Fast Dx
- Abbott ID Now
- DiaPlexQ (PCR)

"These options are available now as a result of significant technological advances in laboratory science over the last three decades, resulting in small populations being able to benefit from highly complex testing. This was not the case years ago when jurisdictions like the CNMI with only a population of 55,000 needed to send our specimens off island to Honolulu or San Francisco, where larger populations allowed for efficient use of very large and complex testing platforms," said CEO Muña.

The Governor's Task Force and CHCC are finalizing a CNMI testing implementation plan based on the HHS strategy listed below:

US Department of Health and Human Services COVID-19 Testing Strategy

Priority 1:

- Hospitalized patients and healthcare facility workers with symptoms

Priority 2:

- Patients in long-term care facilities with symptoms
- Patients 65 years of age or older with symptoms
- Patients with underlying conditions with symptoms
- First responders with symptoms

Priority 3:

- Critical infrastructure workers with symptoms
- Individuals who do not meet any of the above categories with symptoms
- Healthcare facility workers and first responders
- Individuals with mild symptoms in communities experiencing high numbers of COVID-19 hospitalizations

Governor Torres noted that the overall prioritization of testing will be determined by CHCC, but particular priority will be given to hospitalized patients, persons under investigation, healthcare workers, man'amko, and frontline first responders.

“To the great people of the Commonwealth, I want to thank you all for your patience and we are working extremely hard to get as many people tested as possible. Our goal since Day One is to test everybody. It is going to take some time, but we are definitely moving in that direction,” said Governor Torres.

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