NYC Sets Up Its Own Coronavirus Test Lab

"This is not our first rodeo," Cuomo said, reminding people of the successfully-managed Ebola, swine flu and bird flu crises of the past.

March 3, 2020 By Mike Barr

Following the news that the first New York City resident has tested positive for the novel coronavirus, the city has received permission from CDC to perform its own tests locally, Gov. Andrew Cuomo and Mayor Bill de Blasio said at a press conference Monday.

De Blasio tweeted after the press conference that the city expected to have the testing facility open late Monday, even earlier than expected.

"This will help us diagnose people in hours instead of days," de Blasio said.

Previously, samples had to be sent to the Center for Disease Control's lab in Atlanta, delaying results for at least 48 hours and limiting the number of people who could be tested.

"The CDC, the federal government now allowing us to test is a very big deal. And it will have a dramatic effect on how quickly we can mobilize and respond," Cuomo said. Wadsworth Center — the state's public health laboratory in Albany — has also been conducting testing this week, and is coordinating with private hospitals and labs on the proper protocol.

"We want to get testing capacity as high as possible," Cuomo said. The state's goal is to get to 1,000 tests a day, statewide, by the end of the week. The test itself takes several hours to conduct. "But within about 12 hours the results are turned around from start to finish," Cuomo said.

NYC health care worker first to test positive

The first person from New York City testing positive for COVID-19 is a 39-year-old Manhattan woman, a health care worker who returned from Iran last Tuesday. She and her husband took a private car home from the airport, Cuomo said. The husband, also a health care worker, is presumed to have the virus and has been tested, but his results aren't back yet. The woman has respiratory symptoms but is not in serious condition, and the couple is staying at home in self-isolation.

“She did not take any public transportation, as she was a health care worker she was very aware of this situation and the potential for this situation,” Cuomo said.

“We don’t believe that she was contagious when she was on the plane or when she took a private car from the airport to her residence. But out of an abundance of caution, we’ll be contacting the people who were on the flight with her from Iran to New York and the driver of that car service.”

Disease detectives

De Blasio said the city’s “disease detectives … track back everyone’s interactions if they contract a disease, do the work to figure out who they’ve come in contact with … In this case this individual has only one person they’ve been in prolonged contact with, that’s their husband.”

Cuomo said there is no doubt that there will be more cases. “We said early on, it was not a question of if, but when,” he said. “Our challenge now is to test as many people as you can.

The governor and mayor said they felt confident that the health care system was ready and New Yorkers would take coronavirus in stride.

“This is not our first rodeo,” Cuomo said, reminding people of the successfully-managed Ebola, swine flu and bird flu crises of the past.

The testing is about reducing the spread, not eliminating the spread of the virus, Cuomo said. “Yes, it will spread, like, by the way, the flu spreads every year.” There are more than 10,500 cases of flu in New York State this week alone.

Kids mostly unscathed

Coronavirus produces only mild symptoms in 80 percent of those infected, with older people and those with compromised immune systems hit the hardest.

Symptoms include fever, cough, and respiratory problems. Children have been left almost completely unscathed, according to statistics from China and other places around the world. Four deaths have occurred in a nursing home in Washington State, and health officials are working to control the outbreak there.

“So far, it does not seem to be a disease that focuses on our kids — in fact, the opposite,” de Blasio said.

The state is instituting a new cleaning protocol at schools and in the public transportation system, Cuomo said.

De Blasio asked people who have the symptoms “and have any nexus to the nations where the issue is profound at this point,” to get health care. He added, if people “don’t have their own doctor, they don’t know if they can pay for it, they don’t happen to speak English, they don’t have a way to get to the doctor, they may be disabled,” the city will help them. “Whatever it is, call 3-1-1.”

Putting it in perspective

In this flu season so far, 14,000 people in New York City alone have had the flu.

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http://beta.docker.poz.com/blog/nyc-starts-coronavirus-test-lab