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In this file photo, health care workers collect swabs from people who are suspected of having COVID-19. (Associated Press)

CORONAVIRUS

Officials: People Must Meet Criteria Before Getting COVID-19 Test

BY ANTHONY LEONE | ORLANDO

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STATEWIDE — While people have heard about drive-thru COVID-19 testing locations, health officials stressed that strict criteria must be met first before anything can be done.

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Kent Donahue pointed out that people must have the following telltale symptoms of COVID-19, such as: a fever, cough and shortness of breath.

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If people think if they have the coronavirus symptoms, they can call their health care provider, who will direct them on the steps that need to be taken to be tested if the doctor believes they have the symptoms, said Donahue, the public information officer for the Florida Department of Health in Orange County.

He also suggested that people could contact their county's coronavirus center, which for Orange County is open Monday through Friday, from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Those centers are:

- [Florida Department of Health](#) for all areas: 1-866-779-6121
- [Orange County](#): 407-723-5004
- [Brevard County](#)
- [Flagler County](#)
- [Lake County](#)
- [Marion County](#)
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Donahue said the department's Orange County's coronavirus center receives up to 75 calls a day alone. When someone does contact that call center, that person will be evaluated and if it is determined the person might be a candidate for the virus, him or her will be directed as to where to go to get tested.

He did say that people should practice social distancing — staying 6 feet apart — and washing hands in order to prevent the spread of the virus.

Donahue said the department in Orange County is geared up for collecting test samples from people, but it is not yet ready to set up drive-thru testing locations.

The Florida State Emergency Operations Center told Spectrum News 13 in an email that both the federal government and the state are working to set up the drive-thru testing sites as quickly as possible.

"The drive-thru testing site will allow health care workers, first responders and those 65 and older with COVID-19 symptoms to be tested and alleviate testing needs in the area," the center stated.

At the sites, people will have a swab sample collected and it will be sent to the nearest lab for testing.

The center said the sites would be staffed by the Florida National Guard members and nurses, but did not state when these drive-thru locations would be made available or where the locations would be.

Although, during a news conference, Gov. Ron DeSantis did say there would be three federal testing sites located at the Orange County Convention Center, the Jacksonville Jaguars stadium and the Miami Dolphins stadium, according to the center.

Meanwhile, private medical facilities have started drive-thru testing areas throughout the country and one of them is in Central Florida.

[Premier Medical Associates](#) started doing drive-thrus at their locations in The Villages and Ocala on March 10, said the company's Vice President of Patient Care Lina Cohen.

She said Premier Medical Associates is planning to set up drive-thrus testing locations at their Orlando and Kissimmee offices next week, but like Donahue, she says there are steps that need to be taken before people are tested.

Not just patients of Premier Medical Associates, but anyone can call the company's free teleconference number at 352-561-3182 to schedule a virtual appointment with a doctor, Cohen said, who stated that up to 20 people are screening calls at the call center.

And she said there is a reason why people should call the number first.

"We don't want people to leave their houses" and spread the virus to others either in the community or at Premier Medical Associates' offices, she said.

The next step is speaking with the doctor and if the doctor feels the person might have COVID-19, then that person will be instructed to go to a drive-thru testing location, explained Cohen.

Her instructions to people who use the drive-thru are:

- Don't get out of the car.
- Don't talk to the person.
- Roll your window down.
- Nose and mouth will be swabbed.

Once the swabs are collected, they will be sent to the Control Centers For Disease and Prevention, explained Cohen, who added that if the test comes back positive for COVID-19, then the CDC will notify that person.

She said that the tests are free and that her company has gotten the test kits from labs and from the state of Florida.

[DeSantis said last week that 2,500 test kits](#) had been ordered by the state and would be shipped out to facilities.

The company conducted between 25 to 29 tests on Monday at their two locations in The Villages and Ocala, Cohen said.

Cohen said that Premier Medical Associates wants to have teleconference calls with people out of the state of Florida and the company is currently working with labs in various states to make that happen.

However, she was adamant that the tests should only be for those who need it.















"Selfishness will kill us all. Don't take the test just to take it," Cohen warned those who do not have the symptoms.

[AdventHealth](#) shared a news release with Spectrum News 13, which instructs people that the group will only do a COVID-19 test with a doctor's order.

"Physicians will order a test only for those who meet testing criteria as defined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. There are no community drive-up/drive-thru testing sites currently at AdventHealth," the company stated.

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What does being sick with COVID-19 look like compared with a cold or the flu?

COLD/UPPER RESPIRATORY INFECTION	INFLUENZA	COVID-19
 Runny/stuffy nose/sneezing	 Fatigue	 Fatigue
SOMETIMES: Sore throat 	Aches and Pain 	Dry Cough 
 SOMETIMES: Fatigue	Fever 	Fever 
RARE SYMPTOM: Aches and Pain 	Cough 	SOMETIMES: Runny nose 
	Runny/stuffy nose 	MAJOR SYMPTOM: Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing 

Information compiled from Florida Dept. of Health, CDC.

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