

**To the Mayor and Members of the City Council****February 1, 2022**

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SUBJECT: OPTIONS FOR COVID-19 TESTING TO LOCAL SMALL BUSINESSESIssue

It is recognized that COVID-19 infection surges create more exposures and a higher demand for COVID-19 testing. Increased demand for testing can stress traditional COVID-19 testing providers such as doctors' offices and pharmacies which may temporarily be out of stock with tests or have very limited appointment availability.

Government funded testing sites work to relieve these temporary system stresses, but do not replace them on an ongoing basis. Private, non-profit and government testing have been the backbone during the pandemic; however, the distribution of rapid at-home tests by the federal government will provide a more convenient option for all residents and businesses.

Local Business Testing Options

During the pandemic, the JEOC has partnered with other agencies to provide additional testing for business groups/units based on a number of factors including participation, infection rates, risks, critical staffing, etc. At this juncture, there are a number of widely available testing options:

- Newly available, free rapid tests provided to all residents from the federal government. Residents can request free test this time: www.covidtests.gov
- Newly announced insurance requirements to cover up to 8 rapid tests per month/per member (in addition to tests provided by the federal government)
- Widely-available, free rapid testing through private providers throughout the city (street corners/lots)
- Increased testing participation through county health departments with contracts in place to grow testing resources with surges
- Testing of children in schools
- Testing widely-available through healthcare, although access can be limited by appointment requirements.
- Supplemental testing by local governments, including Fort Worth, during surges or when other resources cannot meet demand.

These testing options result in the least waste of unused tests (unexpired tests are available when needed) and the greatest distribution of tests to the general public, including employees at businesses.

A general/direct allocation of COVID-19 tests by the City to local businesses would be very costly and would result in greater waste (tests not being used/expiring). As an example, the City's current costs for PCR/molecular tests is approximately \$50 per test, and self-administered rapid antigen tests are approximately \$10 per test. Testing costs are paid upfront, whether materials used or not (just like over-the-counter rapid tests).

A better, hybrid strategy would be to follow the current practices of providing a COVID-19 hotline to assist businesses with quick/efficient testing resources, if they are unable to procure tests themselves. This includes matching business needs with testing partner resources. The city could add an additional feature where we reserve a reasonable number of rapid and PCR tests for circumstances that would require the direct distribution of tests to a particular business.

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The city continues to offer pop-up vaccination sites. While it is never ideal to combine vaccinations with the testing of sick people (exposures), staff have learned many best practices from these operations and, if needed, staff could offer pop-up testing at various sites based on business requests on location. This setup would help to mitigate a waste of tests, and it would allow for proper reporting to occur for results. Local businesses would be able to submit a request for an event through either a webform or by calling the City of Fort Worth's COVID-19 hotline. While we could not provide in-home or business calls for all circumstances, we can provide assistance for businesses with the greatest need.

The best and most cost-effective option remains to encourage use of existing, free testing sites offered through the City of Fort Worth and other providers. Any businesses needing support should reach out to the COVID-19 hotline: (817) 392-8478. Staff have communicated with Fort Worth chambers of commerce to ensure businesses have access to testing.

Questions on this informal report should be addressed to Brandon Bennett, Code Compliance Director at 817-392-6322.

David Cooke
City Manager