

No appointment needed for COVID-19 testing for food industry workers

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As part of the state's proactive testing efforts to identify, isolate and trace new cases, the Department of Health has designated special statewide COVID-19 testing hours for all employees who work to provide New Mexican families with food, including workers at restaurants, grocery stores, farmers' markets, distribution centers and food manufacturing facilities.

The McKinley County location for the testing has changed since NMDOH first announced it on June 10. McKinley County Nurse Manager Erica Marquez told the *Gallup Sun* that the location for testing in July will be at 705 Gurley Ave., Lions Hall parking lot at the campus of UNM-Gallup and will be held on Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 9 am-11:30 am.

She also said a plan is currently in place to roll out an app in July that will allow those who wish to, to register online for an appointment. But she was emphatic that appointments are not necessary for food industry workers to get tested in McKinley County.

"Our essential food industry workers continue to help New Mexican families access food," New Mexico Environment Department Cabinet Secretary James Kenney said. "Now we can help our essential food industry workers access proactive testing for COVID-19. Food industry employers are strongly urged to take advantage of this testing."

"Broadscale testing will ultimately result in more lives saved," Department of Health Cabinet Secretary Kathy Kunkel said. "Even as we reopen, COVID-19 is still out there, and we must continue to be vigilant."

"Part of the New Mexico Restaurant Association's mission is to 'protect the hospitality industry in New Mexico,' and we feel that encouraging participation in this widespread testing effort is our duty under that promise," Carol Wight, CEO of the New Mexico Restaurant Association said. "Making testing readily accessible to our industry protects our employees and customers, and we ask that every New Mexico restaurant consider doing their part to slow the spread of COVID-19 by encouraging their staff to get tested."

Many people who are infected with coronavirus may not experience any symptoms while still

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having the potential to pass the virus onto others, making large scale testing incredibly important in preventing its spread — and keeping New Mexico on a path toward reopening the economy.

Testing as many food industry workers as possible builds consumer confidence while helping employers minimize their occupational risk of an asymptomatic employee spreading the disease in the workplace. If proactive testing identifies a positive case, the New Mexico Environment Department and Department of Health will contact the employer about the appropriate next steps to take to prevent the spread of the virus, including disinfection and follow-up testing. Proactive testing can minimize disruption to operations.

Testing is free, but those who have insurance should bring their cards with them.