Gov. announces free at-home COVID-19 tests

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New Mexico's governor announced residents can access free COVID-19 tests they can administer themselves at home, with results as soon as 24 hours later.

Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham said New Mexicans can order the saliva testing kits, regardless of whether or not they're symptomatic or have come into close contact with an individual who tested positive for coronavirus. If they wish, residents can use Zoom to talk to a supervisor who can help administer the test before they mail it off to the lab for results.

"We can drive down county positivity rates, help more businesses and workers get safely back on their feet, and keep more New Mexicans healthy," Lujan Grisham said in a Dec. 22 news release. "But it all starts with you, and it starts with getting a test. This is a very, very promising development."

Referring to the Department of Health's color-coded system for tracking the number of coronavirus infections, Lujan Grisham added that testing can get the state from a "red" to "green" status.

Currently, McKinley and all other counties, except Catron, in the "red" phase, with a positivity rate of 5 percent or more a day, in addition to an average of eight daily cases or more per 100,000 people. In order for any area of the state to be designated as "green," average cases and positivity rates must be trending at the same rates in the opposite direction.

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According to the Department of Health's website, McKinley County has a positivity rate of 19.4 percent and 134 cases per 100,000 people.

New Mexico had a total of 149,984 positive COVID-19 cases as of Dec. 28.

Health Secretary-designate Dr. Tracie Collins called testing is "an absolutely essential tool in our fight against the virus."

"When we know who's positive, we can isolate the virus and cut down on transmission," she said. "New Mexicans should have every confidence in the testing our state makes available.

Human Services Secretary David Scrase echoed what Collins said about knowing the status of the infection in every community in New Mexico, if as many people get tested as possible.

"I hope New Mexicans take advantage of this simple and accessible means of testing – and continue to undertake all COVID-safe behaviors in their day-to-day lives," he said.

All anyone needs to get a free coronavirus test is an email address, photo ID and internet access, particularly if they want to access a supervisor to help them take it. Those tested will be asked for basic identification information, including date of birth and their insurance provider. Though even if someone does not have health insurance, they can still get access to a test.

The tests will be mailed to individuals who request it and then sent via UPS prepaid package to the lab. Results will be available 24 to 48 hours after it arrives there.

This at-home testing is made possible through a public private partnership between the state and Vault Health.

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More information about the at-home tests can be found at learn.vaulthealth.com/nm/ .