



STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
P. O. BOX 3378
HONOLULU, HI 96801-3378

In reply, please refer to:
File:

September 7, 2021

Senator Donovan M. Dela Cruz
Hawaii State Capitol
415 S. Beretania Street
Room 208
Honolulu, HI 96813

Dear Chair Dela Cruz:

Thank you for your August 31 inquiry on COVID-19 testing. Please see responses from the Hawaii Department of Health (DOH) below.

1. Can the DOH require all testing sites to put a sticker on a vial or test that indicates they're positive or not and add it to the daily reporting?

DOH receives both positive and negative COVID-19 test results from testing sites via electronic laboratory reporting, which is required by federal law and state statute. DOH reports the positive COVID-19 tests (i.e., cases) in its daily COVID-19 reporting. In addition, all people who are tested for COVID-19 receive their individual test results, positive or negative, in compliance with federal law and state statute.

2. Would providing this number daily give us a better indication of how much the disease is spreading, who is getting tested, and whether the majority of people testing are vaccinated? If not, are we getting a clear understanding of our positivity rate?

DOH reports the positive COVID-19 tests (i.e., cases) and the test positivity rate online daily at 9:00 AM. The most important data is the trend of cases and test percent positivity, as it takes into account daily variations related to the number of tests on any given day.

DOH continues to work with partners to increase access to testing, including implementing weekly testing in DOE schools.

3. Why is the State exhausting tests on re-testing positive individuals at Aloha Stadium when the FDA says it's not necessary to re-test a positive antigen result because it's highly accurate if it is positive?

It is a standard laboratory practice to confirm unexpected results. In the course of testing at Aloha Stadium, studies were published that affirmed the reliability of positive Abbott BinaxNow antigen test results. In accordance with these findings, Hawaii's increasing COVID-19 positivity rate and increased prevalence of asymptomatic infection, DOH changed its protocol to not confirm positive tests because the positive predictive value had improved.

DOH continued to perform confirmatory testing on symptomatic individuals who received a negative BinaxNow test result. This picks up additional positives.

4. It is a high possibility that these tests are not highly accurate if it's negative. Why are we not using PCR tests during this unprecedented surge?

Peer-reviewed studies show that the tests we were using, Abbott BinaxNow antigen tests, perform very well in identifying positive results during community testing events. If a person tests negative, but has symptoms, another nucleic acid amplification test immediately on-site.

Hawai'i's COVID-19 testing capacity continues to be limited. Rapid antigen tests increase capacity for community testing and permit immediate public health action on results.

5. Many people who are vaccinated will believe they have a cold or allergies and are continuing going to work and spreading the virus further unknowingly. What is the department's plan to provide more and clearer information about breakthrough cases and their symptoms so people can remain vigilant and understand that the Delta variant can infect you and make you ill?

Everyone with symptoms consistent with COVID-19, regardless of vaccination status, should get tested. A core mitigation strategy is for employees to stay home if they are ill and get tested for COVID-19. DOH has updated our guidance resources that are publicly available on our website to make this information more widely available.

This information is included in DOH communications and materials provided to the public during DOH testing events. In addition, the State of Hawai'i has an indoor mask mandate to help prevent the spread of COVID-19, regardless of vaccination status. DOH conducts investigations to determine the vaccination status of individuals who have been infected with COVID-19 and are hospitalized or die.

DOH has publicized information on breakthrough cases through local media. To date, there have been 883,321 people fully vaccinated. Among those fully vaccinated, there have been 2,504 people with COVID-19, 73 people hospitalized, and 12 deaths due to COVID-19 complications as of August 24.

6. The CDC's website states it's up to state health authorities to require a pre- or post-test to all travelers. If we're following their guidance, why are we not imposing it when they are leaving it up to the state to decide?

The State of Hawai'i has a travel requirement to test prior to arrival for people who can't show proof of full vaccination and chose not to quarantine for 10 days upon arrive.

DOH continues to articulate that the optimal travel testing strategy would be to test everyone, regardless of resident and vaccination status, 24-48 hours prior to travel and at day three post-arrival with strict quarantine until a negative test result is received. However, the State of Hawai'i does not have the laboratory capacity to perform 25,000-30,000 additional tests every day to accommodate arrivals or the logistics to ensure enforcement of a third day post-arrival test.

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Should the Committee have further inquiries on COVID-19 testing or other matters, please contact Joy Kobayashi at joy.kobayashi@doh.hawaii.gov.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth A. Char, MD, FACEP
Director of Health

Cc: Sen. Jarrett Keohokalole, Sen. Michelle Kidani, Sen. Donna Mercado Kim,
Sen. Sharon Moriwaki, Sen. Kurt Fevella