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Surging COVID-19 case counts & test volume force changes to data reporting and case investigation

HONOLULU – The Hawai'i Department of Health (DOH) will temporarily stop reporting specific data sets on Sunday, January 16 so its data collection and reporting system can continue to accurately process the thousands of positive tests recorded at laboratories daily.

DOH systems have not been able to process the large volume of positive and negative cases in recent days. As a result, thousands of cases, both positive and negative, have not been reported.

In order to expedite the processing and reporting of positive cases, DOH will suspend the processing of negative cases. This will allow for accurate positive case counts.

All tests, both positive and negative, must be processed in order to ascertain positivity rates and produce certain data sets. Therefore, positivity rates and some data sets will not be available while DOH assesses alternative ways to accurately report on both positive case counts and percent positivity regardless of testing volume.

Record COVID-19 case counts in recent weeks are also necessitating a change in case investigation. Contact tracers simply cannot keep pace with the large number of COVID-19 cases.

Contact tracers are focusing their attention on priority groups including COVID-19 clusters associated with schools and high-risk settings such as long-term care facilities.

“We have reported roughly 48,000 COVID-19 cases in the past two weeks. It would be unrealistic to think our 378 contact tracers could get in touch with all those people. So, we are focusing on providing general and setting-specific guidance, and on cluster investigations that will help protect vulnerable populations,” said State Epidemiologist Dr. Sarah Kemble.

“The number of cases Hawai‘i is experiencing is unprecedented, leading to a tremendous demand for testing. As testing data flows through the electronic reporting system, the system is stressed. Our essential DOH employees are also wrestling with tremendous challenges. We must adapt to address these circumstances,” said Health Director Dr. Elizabeth Char, FACEP.

“Everyone can be part of the solution. Wear well-fitting masks. Don’t take them off near anyone from outside your household. Avoid large crowds. And if you have COVID symptoms or think you have been exposed, isolate yourself immediately. Isolating yourself to slow transmission is absolutely necessary,” Char added.

Vaccination and testing options are available at hawaiiicovid19.com.

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