

# Louisiana's Plan to Expand COVID-19 Testing

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## Overview

In Louisiana, testing for COVID-19 began February 29, 2020 and on March 9, 2020, the first case in the State was diagnosed. Since then, Louisiana has gone from a very limited amount of testing that was only available in our state lab to now having commercial labs across the state to complete and report as many tests as possible. On May 11, Governor John Bel Edwards announced that Louisiana would enter Phase One of the State's Roadmap to a Resilient Louisiana. As we prepared to ease restrictions on the economy, there was a need to significantly increase testing and contact tracing across the state. While initial testing was focused in areas with high infection rates, testing per capita varied across all parishes of the State. In addition, our data show a high rate of positivity and death rates in African American populations.

Louisiana aims to increase testing by 100,000 tests per month, doubling its testing capacity at baseline in April, with a focus on vulnerable populations. In addition, to know we are reaching every corner of the state, we set an ambitious target of testing more than 2% of residents in every parish, with an overall goal of testing more than 4% of the State's overall population each month. As we increase testing we do expect to unearth more positive cases; therefore, we also aim for the percentage of tests returning with positive results to be under 10% for each parish.

## Louisiana's Testing Plan

### Target: Increase testing by 100K per month

- Features a **multi-pronged approach** to test vulnerable populations, including congregate settings (e.g., nursing homes and correctional facilities), communities with insufficient access to testing (e.g., African American or rural communities), and populations that require specialized approaches to testing (e.g., populations with special needs).
- Leverages in-state laboratory resources with **coordinated regional mapping** to reduce turn-around time while supporting the state economy.
- **Trains staff and personnel in congregate settings** to educate on the use of personal protective equipment, infection control strategies, and guidance on cohorting positive patients to control the spread and protect residents and staff.
- Incorporates **multiple types of testing** to meet the needs of the population tested, providing compassionate protocols to sensitive populations.
- Features a **flexible model** in testing to accommodate the needs of different settings and varying resources in partner communities.
- Includes **increased access to African American and other minority populations**, rural communities with reduced access to testing, and populations with special needs.

## Progress: On track to meet 200K target by end of May

- Testing in Louisiana continues to increase week over week. We are currently on track to meet our 200K target by end of May.
- Percent positivity continues to come down, though we have more work to do. The percentage of tests returning with positive results is 13.5% statewide with some parishes exceeding 45% positivity with 2.5% of the parish tested.
- Getting tested for COVID-19 is easy, safe and comes at no up-front cost. Under the Federal Families First Coronavirus Response Act, Louisiana Medicaid will cover testing for coronavirus for Louisiana residents without health insurance. Thanks to Medicaid expansion **Louisiana's uninsured rate is approximately 8%, lower than the national average.** For more information on this program visit [www.ldh.la.gov/COVIDuninsured](http://www.ldh.la.gov/COVIDuninsured).
- LDH recommends COVID-19 testing for any patients who are experiencing symptoms such as fever, cough or shortness of breath. If you have these symptoms, contact your primary care physician for guidance. To find the nearest test site near you, you can visit the LDH coronavirus webpage [www.ldh.la.gov/coronavirus](http://www.ldh.la.gov/coronavirus) and click on the "community test sites" button on the left side of the page.

## About the Testing Action Collaborative

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The State formed a multi-sector Testing Action Collaborative (TAC) at the beginning of April to **increase coordination of testing efforts and design a collaborative statewide testing model.** The TAC is made up of members from academic organizations, research facilities, private and public laboratories, law enforcement, insurance companies, professional physician organizations, and the state lab and epidemiology teams. The TAC has sub-workgroups focused on supply chain coordination, geographic coordination of statewide testing, and serology testing.