



March 24, 2020

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Dear Mr. Stewart and Mr. Winslow:

I am writing in response to your letter to Governor McMaster dated March 24, 2020. Please allow me to address the issues you raised, addressing the second issue first.

As to your request for a gubernatorial directive granting priority status for testing of COVID-19 to first responders that have come in contact with an infected patient, that issue is now resolved. After significant planning and discussion over the last few days, DHEC finalized arrangements for first responders to receive priority testing status. The details of those arrangements will be shared on the 10:00 am county call tomorrow.

As to your request for a gubernatorial directive authorizing the county emergency management official to be informed of the location of infected people in their county, the Governor has requested DHEC provide the location of those who have tested positive for COVID-19 in South Carolina by zip code for the prior fourteen (14) days. We have begun working on a process to provide this information as soon as possible.

Importantly, all those with COVID-19 have not been tested. Therefore, the information provided by DHEC will not reflect some zip codes where cases exist or all cases in a zip code where cases are identified. **First responders should continue to observe CDC guidance for every call.**

DHEC is providing the zip codes of only those who have tested positive for COVID-19 in South Carolina. There are many more people in the community who have the disease who have never been tested. DHEC does not know who these people are or where they live. In addition, DHEC is not notified when individuals are no longer infectious (i.e., they are well). Therefore, the numbers DHEC will provide by zip code will not include all infected people and will contain some who no longer pose any risk to others.

South Carolina is moving from a disease containment strategy to a disease mitigation strategy based upon evidence of continued increasing transmission. In a mitigation phase, testing strategies transition from attempting to test all possible cases in a community to testing a reasonable sample of those who are ill. The goal becomes monitoring disease spread in a community, not identifying every case. Consequently, the gap between DHEC's knowledge of the tested and lack of knowledge of the untested will continue to expand.

DHEC recommends that first responders make decisions about the use of PPE in accordance with CDC guidance, which is based on risk assessments for the expected types of exposures for specific job duties.

Per current CDC guidance, law enforcement officials are at low risk for occupational exposure to COVID-19 and should follow guidance provided for individuals working in business, not healthcare, settings. CDC's Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers to Plan and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) can be found at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-business-response.html>.

CDC considers EMS workers to be in a different category of risk for exposure and, therefore, DHEC recommends that EMS providers review and implement CDC's Interim Guidance for Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Systems and 911 Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs) for COVID-19 in the United States. That guidance can be found at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/guidance-for-ems.html>. The guidance provides steps to assist 911 dispatchers in identifying potential risks related to COVID-19, and such information could be provided to law enforcement when responding to calls. **Importantly, any individual who tests positive for COVID-19 in South Carolina and calls 911 is subject to DHEC's isolation and quarantine directive which requires the person to notify 911 there is an infected person at the location.** Still, following CDC guidance is the best precaution first responders can take to adequately protect themselves and the public.

I hope this information is helpful and appreciate your efforts in working with us to address this crisis in South Carolina.

With regards,

Richard K. Toomey, Director

Cc: The Honorable Henry D. McMaster

