HHS National COVID-19 Testing Implementation Forum (NTIF)

Meeting #1

Teleconference

Thursday, July 30, 2020

2-3:30 p.m. EDT

The Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health launched the National COVID-19 Testing Implementation Forum (NTIF) with this meeting. The purpose of the forum is to obtain individual input from organizations. HHS is not seeking collective advice and that the U.S. government will not make decisions at this meeting. The U.S. government will consider individual input here and in other deliberations. This meeting focused on updates from the federal government on the testing supply chain.

The Assistant Secretary for Health contextualized the forum objectives, stating that the goal of testing is to get the right test at the right time to the right person in order to provide actionable and timely results. This is to support public health isolation and contact tracing, diagnose hospitalized patients rapidly, protect particularly vulnerable populations such as those in nursing homes, support the safe reopening of schools and businesses, and enable state testing plans.

Forum participants were asked to describe their role in the organization they represent, and to state one priority they would like the NTIF to achieve. These priorities included overcoming barriers to test access, availability, and result reporting; increased transparency of testing resources and numbers; resolving supply chain issues; testing cost coverage; providing a forum for collaboration and the sharing of novel strategies for testing; and expansion of point-of-care testing.

PRESENTATIONS FROM FEDERAL PARTICIPANTS:

The Department of Health and Human services gave a presentation on the status of the testing supply chain. HHS is working with manufacturers to try to break bottlenecks in the supply chain, and from August to December, HHS expects the number of tests to ramp up significantly. The federal government has supplied swabs and media to states and is routinely surging supplies to states when needed. The breakdown of the types of swabs and media that are expected to be available through the end of year was presented and HHS noted that point-of-contact antigen supplies are going to expand testing capacity in nursing homes.

The Department of Defense gave an overview of how the Defense Production Act (DPA) is being used. There are laws that restrict DPA use, and the DPA is used sparingly and only when necessary for the nation. The presentation noted that the federal government doesn't always know what key supply chain issues are, so HHS is asking this forum what gaps exist. DPA actions are currently focused on swabs and expanding diagnostic test kit production, but additional areas of interest are reagents; consumables such as pipette tips and media; and manufacturing that supports production of these items.

DISCUSSION

The discussion included the importance of collecting and reporting demographic data during testing, and a clarification of the roles for distributed testing equipment versus testing equipment that is pre-existing. Clarification was provided for the HHS projected number of tests for December.

The need for updated testing guidance for schools and workplaces, and where testing should be directed was discussed. There was a request to distribute the presented data on projected testing numbers.

PRESENTATIONS ON TESTING CAPACITY

AdvaMed, which represents medical technology companies broadly, presented on their DX Registry which is a national registry of diagnostic supplies that can be used to give a more comprehensive view of testing capacity and to anticipate shifting demands. AdvaMed has been collecting data into this registry and has recently started publishing weekly results, each Friday, in aggregated national and state reports. The data included represents only what is available from manufacturers, but as more information becomes available the reports will include more information. The reports will also expand to include antigen tests and others represented in the NTIF were welcomed to participate in the data collection.

DISCUSSION

The participants discussed the hurdles to the FDA authorization of lab-developed tests and potential solutions to those hurdles, as well as the need to distribute testing supplies and testing capacity to hot spots across the country as they develop.

Action Items

- Forum participants who were unable to attend the teleconference are invited to e-mail the Office of the Assistant Secretary to state their priorities for this forum.
- Forum participants are invited to describe specific additional information they would like to see on supply chain issues.
- Participants of the forum asked the HHS to consider making data presented on testing and supply chain expectations more widely available.
- The FDA will be asked to respond to the NTIF on the different paths available for authorizing COVID-19 tests.
- The next meeting will address surveillance and what is needed for school and business reopening
- Feedback may be provided via ntif@hhs.gov.