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MASONIC MEDICAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE BEGINS RAPID TESTING FOR COVID-19

The MMRI Expands COVID-19 Efforts Further by Rolling Out Drive-Thru Rapid Testing

UTICA, NY — After receiving a Limited Service Laboratory registration from the New York State Department of Health (DOH), the Masonic Medical Research Institute (MMRI) has been approved to administer rapid COVID-19 tests for our community. The MMRI will begin operations for their testing site on January 4, 2021. All tests will be administered by appointment only through an online portal, providing patients the opportunity to pre-register for a designated time slot at least 30 minutes in advance of the test. This is a much needed relief to our community, as MMRI is now only the 3rd site in Oneida County to offer Rapid COVID-19 testing. “As a scientific institution, we have the capabilities to assist our community during these trying times. Our team’s skills, laboratory storage space, and certifications, provide the necessary elements required to run these tests. We are grateful for the generosity of our staff, both science and administration, for helping to make this service available to our community” said Dr. Maria Kontaridis, Executive Director, Gordon K. Moe Professor and Chair, Director of Research at MMRI.

Unlike other testing sites, the Institute will administer their tests as a drive-thru, allowing and requiring patients to remain in their cars for the duration of their appointment. By operating the test site this way, patients will not have to leave the safety of their car, which will ensure minimal contact. Results will also be accessed online within 30 minutes of testing, so there is no need to wait unnecessarily either. “We wanted to determine a way to create a safe and efficient testing service. By allowing patients to remain in their cars, we protect both them and our staff from possible exposure. Additionally, secure online access to results guarantees the testing line will move quickly and that patients will receive their results easily and conveniently at home” said Dr. Jason McCarthy, Assistant Professor and Scientific Operations Manager at MMRI.

The MMRI online portal (mmricovid19.com) allows patients to schedule appointments quickly and confidentially, eliminating the need to wait in line, and provides further details on the testing process. In addition to scheduling an appointment, the portal allows patients to prepay for their test (\$115 per test) and provide a valid email address to receive their receipt and access code to obtain results securely online. MMRI will also report all testing results to the DOH, per NY State guidelines, through the Electronic Clinical Laboratory Reporting System (ECLRS).

The MMRI test site will be open 7 days a week from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. and will administer approximately 200 tests each day. One caveat is that MMRI does not take insurance; therefore, patients will be responsible for submitting their own insurance claims.

Since March 2020, scientists at the MMRI have been adapting their research to include investigations focused on COVID-19. Drs. Sathya Unudurthi, Nathan Tucker, and Zhiqiang Lin have focused their efforts on the virus's relationship to the heart, while Dr. Chase Kessinger has been studying the development of blood clots in response to the virus. Dr. Jason McCarthy, in collaboration with Dr. Benoit Boivin at SUNY Poly, Associated Faculty at MMRI, has been investigating whether drugs can be specifically targeted to the heart to prevent SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) replication, to limit cardiac damage. Along with the ongoing research, the MMRI has partnered with the Mohawk Valley Health System (MVHS) to conduct molecular PCR testing for COVID-19. Since June 1, MMRI has conducted over 20,000 tests for MVHS, with an average turnaround time of 10 hours. More recently, MMRI has volunteered to assist the county in storing the COVID-19 vaccine, which requires ultra-low temperatures to remain stable. "As the Institute owns several ultra-low temperature freezers onsite, we have the ability to assist our community in this capacity, and we are happy to do so. MMRI's mission is to help humanity. We are grateful to have the chance to do this right here, right now, in our own community," said Dr. Kontaridis.

To schedule an appointment, please visit mmricovid19.com. The Masonic Medical Research Institute is located at 2150 Bleecker St. Utica, New York 13501.

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MMRI is dedicated to scientific research that improves the health and quality of life for all. We strive to conduct high quality research aimed at developing a deep understanding of diseases and generating innovative cures and treatments. For more information about MMRI, please visit mmri.edu