



Cambridge
Public Health
Department

Broad Institute COVID-19 Rapid Testing Pilot Program in Cambridge Skilled Nursing and Assisted Living Facilities

April 12, 2020

How did the Broad Institute and City of Cambridge partnership come about?

The Broad Institute of Harvard and MIT approached the Cambridge Public Health Department and offered to manage and conduct COVID-19 surveillance testing of all residents, health care workers, and staff at skilled nursing facilities and assisted living facilities in Cambridge.

Why is this program being launched in Cambridge skilled nursing facilities and assisted living facilities?

The risk associated with COVID-19 to residents in skilled nursing facilities and assisted living facilities is extremely high. While the Cambridge Public Health Department expects that skilled nursing facilities and assisted living facilities in Cambridge are following Massachusetts Department of Public Health guidelines (found [here](#)) and/or best practices, staff at these facilities are under intense pressure at this time.

Rapid testing for all patients/residents, health care workers, and staff will provide timely information about COVID-19 status that skilled nursing facilities and assisted living facilities are currently unable to obtain due to limited availability of testing. Surveillance testing at this time is critical for the continued control and prevention of COVID-19 at these facilities where many residents are at high risk for serious illness and death from COVID-19.

What is the benefit of conducting surveillance testing?

Surveillance testing, which is what this pilot project is undertaking, is a different approach from how most COVID-19 testing is currently being conducted in the United States at this time. Under the surveillance approach, everyone in a given population—in this case, those who live and work in skilled nursing facilities and assisted living facilities—is tested for COVID-19, regardless of whether they have symptoms or feel ill.

This approach will provide a more accurate picture of the true infection rate in skilled nursing facilities and assisted living facilities at a given point in time. By testing an entire population of facility patients/residents and workers, regardless of symptoms, the Cambridge Public Health Department and state partners can move quickly to isolate residents. The goal of rapid identification of positive cases is to break the chain of transmission in these facilities and ultimately reduce the number of people who become infected.

119 Windsor Street
Cambridge, MA 02139
Phone: 617.665.3800 | Fax: 617.665.3888
www.cambridgepublichealth.org



Who is conducting the tests?

The Broad Institute has procured testing supplies and conducted a brief “train the trainers” program for testing process, packaging/labeling, and delivery procedures for Pro EMS field staff. Each screening day is being conducted by three teams of six field providers plus a team leader all in appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) provided by Pro EMS. Samples are being transported to the Broad Institute for testing in their laboratory.

How long will the pilot last?

The pilot was launched on Thursday, April 9, with an initial group getting their first tests completed that day. Residents, staff, and health care workers at each of the seven facilities will be tested twice, with the initial and final tests being conducted three days apart. The pilot is currently slated to run for one week, April 9–15.

Each screening day will be conducted by three teams of six (6) field providers plus a team leader all in appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) provided by Pro EMS. Pro EMS will schedule a team to be onsite in each facility at a specific period during a day shift and will return for a scheduled time during the evening to cover missed staff and add flexibility to the scheduling process for each facility.

If I have family in one of these facilities, can I get tested?

The pilot will test only residents/patients, staff, and health care workers at these facilities.

If a health care worker or staff member at one of these facilities tests positive, will their family members be tested?

Anyone who tests positive will be given medical instruction appropriate to their condition and in accordance with public health recommendations. Family (or other household) members of a worker who has tested positive for COVID-19 should monitor their own health and call their health care provider if they develop symptoms of COVID-19 (e.g., fever, sore throat, loss of sense of smell, cough, and/or shortness of breath).

Will the Broad Institute publicly report the number of positive tests in these facilities?

No. The Broad Institute will share the testing data with the Cambridge Public Health Department, which will then report to both the Massachusetts Department of Public Health and the facility with the positive case(s).

As test results become available for facility residents, health care workers, and staff, the Cambridge Public Health Department will post a daily case count on the city’s COVID-19 data web page: <https://www.cambridgema.gov/covid19/casecount>. This information will be provided in aggregate for all skilled nursing facilities and assisted living facilities in Cambridge.

If this testing capacity exists, why can't people in Cambridge who are symptomatic get tested?

This project is focused on skilled nursing facilities and assisted living facilities because COVID-19 poses a high risk of serious illness and death to people living in skilled nursing facilities and assisted living facilities, and can spread easily among residents and staff at these institutions.

If you have symptoms of COVID-19—which include fever, sore throat, loss of sense of smell, cough, and/or shortness of breath—call your healthcare provider and tell them about your symptoms and your exposure. They will decide whether you need to be tested.

If you are not able to get tested, but believe you may have COVID-19, take the same precautions as if you tested positive. Those precautions can be found here: <https://www.cambridgema.gov/covid19/publichealth>.

Could this program be expanded elsewhere in Cambridge, such as at the War Memorial Temporary Emergency Shelter?

If the COVID-19 rapid testing pilot program is successful, it has the potential to serve as a model for testing operations at other sites in Cambridge and across the Commonwealth. The City will continue to work closely with state and federal public health authorities to expand testing, especially in congregate settings where groups of non-family members live together.

The War Memorial temporary emergency shelter is another example of a congregate setting in which people at high risk for serious illness from COVID-19 are residing together. While the COVID-19 rapid testing program is currently only being piloted at Cambridge skilled nursing facilities and assisted living facilities, the City of Cambridge has put in place a number of measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 at the War Memorial temporary emergency shelter. Additionally, all residents of the temporary emergency shelter are screened prior to entering. The screening includes a series of questions regarding symptoms as well as a temperature check.