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Health organizations partner to open drive-through COVID test site

With Missouri's first cases of novel coronavirus (COVID-19) sparking concern in the community, the city of Joplin and Jasper County Health Departments, Freeman Health System and Mercy have opened Joplin's first drive-through COVID-19 test collection site.

This test collection site is exclusively for patients who meet certain criteria that determine if a test is necessary, such as specific symptoms, a travel history or exposure to a confirmed COVID-positive person. Anyone seeking a test must call ahead to be screened and, if approved, schedule a time to visit the drive-through testing site. The testing site **is not open to the general public**. The number for the screening call center is **417-347-6444**.

"We are pleased to be able to offer this important screening and testing for the community," said Paula Baker, Freeman Health System President and Chief Executive Officer. "As people have growing concern about their flu-like symptoms, we are glad we can help them get definitive answers and ensure they are able to get the treatment they need."

"With COVID-19 beginning to reach our area, we as health care leaders wanted to serve the community by making sure that people who may have contracted the virus have a safe, convenient way to get tested. This drive-through model has worked in many other communities and allows us to efficiently assess people while preserving the safety of others and that of our wonderful health care professionals who will be administering these tests. We hope having a dedicated testing location will be a positive service to the community," said Tracy Godfrey, president of Mercy Clinic Joplin, and Jeremy Drinkwitz, president of Mercy Hospital Joplin, in a joint statement.

The Health Departments, Freeman and Mercy are opening this drive-through location at the Thousand Oaks Imaging Center, 1905 W. 32nd St., to provide a designated place for COVID-19 testing for the community.

After calling the screening number and, if appropriate, being scheduled for a test, health care professionals will collect a sample and send it for testing. Results may take several days. There will be a cost associated with the testing; it's unknown if commercial insurance or government funding will cover any of the cost.

While COVID-19 is spread from person to person, more than 80% of the patients who develop it will only become mildly ill. The concern is for patients with underlying medical conditions and the elderly, who are more likely to need hospital-level supportive care.

People with COVID-19 do **not** have a runny nose or nasal congestion. Symptoms to be aware of include:

- 100.4 fever or higher - 90% will have fever.
- Dry cough - 70% will have a dry cough.
- Shortness of breath – for those who become more acutely ill.

A designated media availability time will be scheduled for members of the press to cover the test site, including photo and video of the operation and the health care professionals staffing it. This media availability will be during real, live testing of patients, but interviews with and images of patients **will not be permitted**.