FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
Monday, May 4, 2020
Contact: San Francisco Joint Information Center, 415-558-2712, dempress@sfgov.org

*** PRESS RELEASE ***
MAYOR LONDON BREED ANNOUNCES UNIVERSAL COVID-19 TESTING FOR ALL ESSENTIAL WORKERS IN SAN FRANCISCO

Anyone who must work during the Stay Home Order is eligible for free testing, with or without symptoms.

San Francisco takes another step toward goal of universal access to testing.

San Francisco, CA — Mayor London N. Breed and Director of Health Dr. Grant Colfax today announced that all essential workers in San Francisco will now be eligible for COVID-19 testing, regardless of symptoms or exposure. The expanded testing criteria is another step toward the City’s goal of universal access to testing for all San Franciscans. The expansion to asymptomatic essential workers is citywide and effective today, and applies to all testing conducted at CityTestSF and the Department of Public Health (DPH) community test sites.

The new policy expands COVID-19 testing to include any essential workers, including health care workers, first responders, grocery clerks, construction workers, drivers, childcare workers and others who continue to leave their homes each day to serve San Francisco during the Stay Home Order. These essential workers interact daily with other people and cannot easily maintain social distance by staying home. For these workers, they can decide when they want the test, but it is important for them to be tested immediately when they feel ill, or have symptoms consistent with COVID-19, or if they believe they have been exposed. No doctor’s note will be required, and the test is free.

DPH recommends that all private providers in San Francisco extend testing to asymptomatic essential workers. Additionally, testing continues to be available for anyone living in San Francisco who either has one symptom or has been exposed to a confirmed case of COVID-19.

“San Francisco’s essential workers have kept our city going for months now during the pandemic response,” said Mayor Breed. “They continue to show up every day, often at great personal risk, and I am so grateful to them. Now that we have our testing program established and are certain that we can test everyone with symptoms, we want to extend to them the opportunity to get tested more easily—for peace of mind and to take action if needed to protect themselves and their families.”

The expansion puts San Francisco squarely on the path to universal access to testing. Any person living in San Francisco is already eligible for testing if they have one COVID-19 symptom, such
as fever, cough, sore throat, or have been in contact with someone with confirmed COVID-19. The City also announced last Friday that all residents and workers in skilled nursing facilities in San Francisco will be required to be tested.

“To achieve our goal of universal access, we have continually expanded testing, based on where the need is greatest, and the availability of resources,” said Dr. Colfax. “We focused first on people with symptoms – in outbreaks, vulnerable populations, case contact investigations and among essential workers. As the circle keeps widening, we now can test more people without symptoms, including close contacts, residents and staff of skilled nursing facilities and essential workers.”

Essential workers can get tested for free at one of the two CityTestSF sites at the Embarcadero and in SoMa. These two sites have the capacity to test 1,500 people per day, and are operated in partnership with Color, Carbon Health, and One Medical. The Department of Public Health’s community test sites also are providing free tests at Southeast Health Center in the Bayview, Castro-Mission Health Center in the Castro, Maxine Hall Health Center in the Western Addition, and Zuckerberg San Francisco General Hospital in the Mission. Appointments for tests are still necessary at all sites in order to ensure social distancing and reduce the number of people waiting for a test at any given time.

For more information about COVID-19 testing, contact your primary health care provider, call 311, or visit SF.gov/GetTestedSF.

“Given that the majority of transmissions of COVID-19 are likely originating from asymptomatic carriers, the broadening of criteria is an important step in achieving universal access to testing,” said Othman Laraki, Color CEO. “We hope that by identifying COVID-19 infections early, CityTestSF can help keep essential workers and the public they serve safer from infection and accelerate the re-opening of the American economy.”

San Francisco’s coronavirus response has consistently prioritized those who are most at risk, and the expanded testing strategy is no different. Essential workers can be at risk because of their job duties, or their own individual risk factors. For example, if the worker is over 60 or has underlying health conditions, or works with people over 60 or with underlying health conditions. Those workers and workers who are members of communities affected by health disparities, income inequality, and/or discrimination are urged to take advantage of the new testing opportunity. The City will be conducting outreach to essential workers in these priority groups to make sure they know about the availability of testing and how to get it.

As the City works toward universal access to testing, the next steps will be testing in additional congregate settings, such as shelters. The City also will increase testing in geographic and cultural communities that are affected by disparities in the spread of the coronavirus.

As important as testing is, it is just one piece of an overall approach to fight the coronavirus. It is just as crucial to prevent getting sick in the first place. That includes staying at home, physical distancing, covering your face when you are around other people, and frequent hand washing.
It is equally important to develop strong systems to respond to the pandemic, including a well-prepared hospital system to handle a surge of cases, an effective contact tracing system to reduce spread and limit exposure, and sufficient supplies of personal protective equipment (PPE) for health care workers and patients.

San Francisco began local COVID-19 testing in the Public Health Lab on March 2, 2020 and has been continually expanding testing capacity. As of today, 25,165 people in San Francisco have been tested, and an average of 9% have tested positive.

Below are a few examples of the City’s testing expansion to date:

- The City opened two CityTestSF sites for symptomatic frontline workers and essential workers as well as San Franciscans who are uninsured or have barriers to health care access. CityTestSF will now accept frontline workers and essential workers without symptoms, close contacts to confirmed COVID-19 cases without symptoms, and anyone living in the city with one symptom consistent with COVID-19.
- DPH has opened test sites in the community at Zuckerberg San Francisco General Hospital, Castro-Mission Health Center, Southeast Health Center and Maxine Hall Health Center. In addition, DPH Jail Health Services tests all people coming into the jail who will be housed in jail.
- DPH announced Friday, May 1 that all residents and staff working at the 21 skilled nursing facilities in San Francisco will be tested for the COVID-19 virus.
- San Francisco now has 26 public and private testing sites across the city at UCSF, NEMS, One Medical, Kaiser, Sutter, Chinese Hospital, and Dignity Health.
- The City is working with partners, such as UCSF and the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative, on COVID-19 testing. There is research underway that uses testing to help us learn more about the prevalence of the virus in the community.

###