



April 16, 2020

### **Why Can't Chambers County Test for COVID-19 Like Other Jurisdictions?**

**CHAMBERS COUNTY, TX-** Chambers County Public Health Department along with the Chambers County Office of Emergency Management have repeatedly attempted to secure testing supplies and the appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) to support a drive through testing facility in Chambers County since mid-March, 2020. Our initial State of Texas Assistance Request (STAR) of 1,000 testing kits was denied, and the Public Health Department was instead sent 5 test kits.

The residents of Chambers County continually ask and wonder why Chambers County does not provide **free** testing, when that message has continually been pushed out from the Federal level. Chambers County has repeatedly requested the resources to enable us to conduct those free COVID-19 tests, but like several other smaller counties, we have been denied the resources to enable us to offer free tests to our residents. Free testing has been ongoing in neighboring jurisdictions, such as Harris County. This has not provided optimal service for Chambers County residents. The lack of communication with the Chambers County Public Health Department from these testing sites has left the county with long delays in receiving test results on our residents, if at all. Repeated formal resource requests to the State to obtain COVID testing kits and PPE have continually been denied in the quantities to support high volume testing sites, with only token quantities being received from the state.

Chambers County Public Health Department and the Office of Emergency Management have also been unsuccessful in obtaining test kits through independent suppliers, as all test kits are on backorder. Again, this leaves Chambers County without the ability to offer free testing, or partner with a local entity to offer free testing for our local residents.

Our local healthcare providers and hospitals have done an amazing job at keeping up with the demand of screening and facilitating COVID-19 testing, but the ability to offer free testing is not available in Chambers County. This is especially troubling as some of our residents do not have the money or ability to travel out of county to obtain a test. Surrounding counties, such as Galveston and Harris, are testing 1,000 people a day, with limited or no criteria. To date, we have been able to facilitate 421 tests out of an estimated population of 44,000 residents. How can this be?

To add to the frustration, Chambers County Public Health was asked last week if we would utilize a highly desirable **Abbott** point-of-care medical lab testing machine to facilitate rapid testing for COVID-19. These machines were being allocated throughout the region to jurisdictions where they could be of value. Although we gladly accepted this offer, we were notified this week that we were denied that machine by the State, and it was instead allocated to another jurisdiction with no explanation or justification as to why.

Chambers County Public Health plans to open a free drive-through testing site with the few testing kits we have received. This testing site will be held for Chambers County residents only, who meet screening criteria. Information on when and where this testing will occur will be released to the public in the next few days. We will continue to try and secure additional tests to meet the needs of our county, which will give accurate data counts representative of active disease in our county. Until we receive additional testing kits, we will not be able to meet our local needs.

We thank you for your continued support in fighting this pandemic together. We believe in preserving, promoting, and protecting the health of our county residents by providing quality and preventive public health services. Please call us with questions, 409-267-2731, or visit us <https://www.co.chambers.tx.us/page/coronavirus>