



# TEXAS COMMISSION ON FIRE PROTECTION

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May 13, 2020

Re: FDs conducting COVID Testing

Chiefs,

The fire service is known for “getting it done”, solving problems, and finding successful solutions. I have no doubt this will once again be the case as I forward the following request to each of you, on behalf of TDEM Chief Nim Kidd. This is a **new request**, separate from Monday’s request.

On Monday, May 11, 2020, Governor Abbott and the other 49 governors in the country were tasked by the White House with conducting COVID-19 testing on all workers and residents in several business types. The largest “at-risk” population identified on the White House phone call were the residents and employees of all nursing homes across the Country. In response, Governor Abbott directed Chief Kidd utilize resources across Texas to accomplish the national goal of testing all these people, within the next two weeks.

The State has multiple resources working to test other COVID-19 clusters including jails, prisons, and meat packing facilities. In fact, many of you are already supporting this mission with personnel for EMTFs and MISTs components being utilized in areas with identified COVID-19 clusters and areas where local emergency response may be limited due to very few or no resources available.

We need the leadership and resources of the Texas fire service to help service the 1,223 nursing homes, which when combined, have a population of residents and staff close to 250,000 people. I have attached the updated spreadsheet with HHSC’s notes on which facilities have had testing in the last 30 days.

Testing conducted by local fire departments is a new task. We encourage you to partner with your local public health authority and other public safety partners, to accomplish this goal. Also, consult and utilize your medical directors as resources for training, education, guidance, and medical direction. By working with your partners, as one local team, you can develop the training and methods to conduct the testing in each of your local facilities.

Additionally, State and local emergency management professionals will be an invaluable asset in coordinating the testing. At the bottom of this letter, is also a link to the TDEM Field Response personnel. Chief Kidd has assured me that TDEM personnel will be glad to provide support as needed. By working together, we can all provide testing in a manner that is efficient, effective, and most importantly, safe to the fire service and the citizens we are testing.

“What authority do I have to test the residents and workers?” is a common question. The authority to test the patients is granted by the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC). Residents will be required to partake in the test or they will have to vacate the licensed facility. Employees will be required to submit to testing or they will be subject to a 14-day quarantine. HHSC will be directing all Nursing Facility Medical Directors to manage the testing for their facility and to work with the local Fire Department to accomplish this mission. Your authority from HHS will be clear. Included in this same email is a letter from HHSC that extends their authority to you.

Speaking of money, all of the costs related to testing are covered by TDEM. We know each of you have questions about the financial aspects and equipment needed to perform the testing. Be assured, your efforts, beginning with planning, to administering the tests, to the actual test results will be covered by monetary funds administered by TDEM. These funds not only include the \$11.24 billion provided to the State in the COVID-19 specific CARES Act, but also through State and FEMA funds.

Regarding equipment, TDEM is diligently working to increase the supply of PPE to local entities. This work is even more critical as they request your partnership in this endeavor. The State and TDEM will assist in every manner possible.

The fire service, through our natural high regard in the communities across Texas, combined with the leadership and “horsepower” we are known to demonstrate, can make another difference in the COVID-19 pandemic battle. We can lead our departments, fellow first responders, and local government partners to provide safe, efficient, and effective COVID-19 testing to the largest at-risk population clusters in our communities and the State. I am confident in each of you, that in the upcoming days we can rapidly mobilize to test every resident and employee of a licensed nursing facility across Texas.

Through your leadership and innovation, I would ask that each of you join Chief Kidd, the Governor, and your local partners in helping to further limit the effects of COVID-19 by leading the efforts within your departments and communities to safely and quickly test every resident and worker in our Texas nursing facilities.

Thank you and stay safe,

Mike Wisko  
Executive Director

#### **TDEM Field Response Personnel**

<https://tdem.texas.gov/field-response/>

#### **San Antonio FD Training Video**

<https://nam02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fapp.box.com%2Fs%2Fgw41qvioa13xs2eyp2fbvul9uju8mv0i&data=01%7C01%7Cnim.kidd%40tdem.texas.gov%7Caf9e160a1cb44266e1d208d7f7026906%7Cf90d3f8300a640eb8eb25fb8d5265096%7C0&sdata=1vSCi49B6T%2FiQV%2FF26%2BxRg0maNZQcgj3OYPSdaSVodQ%3D&reserved=0>



May 13, 2020

**To All Fire Departments:**

On May 11, 2020, Governor Greg Abbott directed that 100 percent of staff and residents in Texas nursing facilities be tested for SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, in accordance with White House guidance.

Texas nursing facilities are licensed under the authority of the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC). The testing teams may consist of state and/or local government personnel, including first responders from local fire departments.

As the Executive Commissioner of HHSC, I authorize fire department personnel to enter licensed nursing facilities for the purpose of collecting specimens for testing for SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19.

Testing teams must self-screen before entering the nursing facility and are expected to bring their own personal protective equipment. The teams are implementing the governor's direction and are authorized to enter the nursing facility.

If a nursing facility has questions about this authorization they should contact the HHSC Long Term Care Regulatory region for assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Phil Wilson".

Phil Wilson



May 13, 2020

**To All Licensed Nursing Facilities in Texas:**

On May 11, 2020, Governor Greg Abbott directed that 100 percent of staff and residents in Texas nursing facilities be tested for SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19.

Nursing facilities licensed by the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) will be contacted very soon by a testing team to schedule specimen collection. Facilities that are scheduled for testing will be given at least 24-hours-notice prior to the specimen collection process taking place. Administrators should make arrangements for off-duty staff to be present at the facility during the specimen collection. The Medical Director for the nursing facility will be the physician of record, or ordering physician, for the testing to ensure test results are sent directly to the facility.

The testing teams may consist of state and/or local government personnel, including first responders from your local fire department, or Texas Military Department. The testing teams will self-screen before entering the nursing facility. Testing teams will bring their own personal protective equipment and all supplies necessary to complete the testing. The teams are implementing the governor and White House's direction and are authorized to enter the nursing facility.

Nursing facilities may choose to conduct testing independent of the state process. If your nursing facility has tested 100 percent of residents and staff within the last 30 days, inform the testing team when you are contacted to schedule testing. You will be required to provide documentation to the team calling to schedule testing and to HHSC Long Term Care Regulatory showing when all residents and staff were tested.

If you have questions about this process, contact the HHSC Long Term Care Regulatory region for assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Phil Wilson".

Phil Wilson