



JACKSON COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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NEWS

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For more information contact:

Jackson County Health Department: Bart Hagston, barth@jchdonline.org, 618-684-3143

Southern Illinois Healthcare: Rosslind Rice, rosslind.rice@sih.net, 618.534.2848 (mobile)

SIU Carbondale: Rae Goldsmith, rae.goldsmith@siu.edu, 618-303-9997 (mobile)

GRANT SUPPORTS EXPANDED COVID-19 TESTING FOR JACKSON COUNTY, SIU

CARBONDALE, Ill --A \$2.8 million grant resulting from a partnership between the Jackson County Health Department, Southern Illinois Healthcare (SIH) and Southern Illinois University Carbondale will bring expanded COVID-19 testing to the county and SIU campus.

The grant was made to the Jackson County Health Department by the Illinois Department of Public Health. Funding came to the state through the Paycheck Protection Program and Health Care Enhancement Act and the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act.

The grant will allow SIH to expand testing at off-site locations, including the SIU campus. It also provides additional resources for contact tracing, equipment and staff.

Bart Hagston, administrator of the Jackson County Health Department, said the department developed the grant application with input from SIH and SIU and submitted it this summer.

“The health department saw the university and SIH as logical partners in efforts to expand testing and tracing,” said Hagston. “SIH was already positioned as a regional leader in conducting COVID-19 testing but was looking for ways to increase efficiency and volume. The university wanted to make testing more widely available to faculty, staff and students.”

The grant’s impact will be highly visible when SIH begins twice-weekly, on-site testing on the SIU campus beginning Monday, September 14. Tests will be available by appointment for any student, faculty or staff member regardless of symptoms. Locations, times and registration information will be posted on the university’s coronavirus website on Friday, September 11.

SIH officials indicate results will be available in 24 to 48 hours. SIH has already worked with the university to provide drive-through testing for students, faculty and staff at its testing site at 500 W. Main St.

“The partnership with SIH and the Jackson County Health Department has been critically important to the safety of the campus community since the onset of the pandemic,” said SIU Chancellor Austin A. Lane. “The availability of on-site testing for all students, faculty and staff is one more example.”

To date, SIH has conducted nearly 33,000 COVID-19 tests, increasing from 500 a week at the start of the pandemic to 2,700 now, says SIH Chief Medical Officer Marci Moore-Connelley, MD.

The grant allows for further growth by supporting the purchase lab and testing equipment that will expand in-house and testing and decrease the turnaround time for results. SIH will receive \$567,000 from the grant, which will also fund SIH staff working to expand testing, including testing at off-site locations. In addition, funding will help cover testing costs for individuals who are uninsured.

SIU will receive \$149,000 from the grant to purchase equipment and supplies that will allow medical staff to get on-site test results for symptomatic students who visit the Student Health Center for tests. Currently, tests taken on campus are sent to SIH for a final diagnosis. Funding will also support the hiring of a nurse to help coordinate testing on campus, purchase quarantine kits to support students placed in quarantine, and purchase additional COVID-19 signage for the campus.

Hagston said \$2.1 million of the grant will be used to fund the health department’s contact tracing efforts through May 2021. Fifteen new employees have joined the department’s existing team dedicated to reducing transmission of COVID-19 through contact tracing, isolation and quarantine, coordinating resources and providing up to date information.

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