



To: Editors and Health Journalists

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NHLS' PREPAREDNESS FOR TESTING TO MEET COVID-19 DEMANDS

The National Health Laboratory Service (NHLS) is stepping up its efforts to fight the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in South Africa.

Dr Kamy Chetty, the NHLS Chief Executive Officer, says that the organisation has adequate testing capacity and equipment to meet the demand. "The NHLS is pursuing various sources of supplies to obtain polymerase chain reaction (PCR)-based test kits and has a commitment from suppliers that South Africa will be a priority," she says.

Currently, the NHLS has six laboratories performing COVID-19-related tests, and the number will increase to nine by April 2020. In addition, the NHLS has 18 state-of-the-art Cobas 6800 and 8800 machines that will dramatically improve the volumes that can be done as well as the turnaround time.

Dr Chetty adds that the NHLS also has over 180 GeneXpert analysers which are available in all provinces for testing by April. The test kit for the GeneXpert was approved by the FDA last week, and the company has started production. The test kits are due to arrive in April.

"The advantage, according to the supplier, is that tests can be processed in 45 minutes, and the smaller machines can be placed in mobile vehicles which makes it ideal for community testing," Dr Chetty says. "It's a pity that this new test kit was not available sooner, as it would have made a huge difference to how testing gets done. We are nevertheless pleased that it will be ready shortly."

The six laboratories that are currently conducting tests are the NHLS National Institute for Communicable Diseases, and Charlotte Maxeke Academic Hospital (both in Gauteng); Groote Schuur and Tygerberg Hospitals (both in Western Cape); Inkosi Albert Luthuli Central Hospital (in KwaZulu-



Natal); and Universitas Hospital (in the Free State). Tshwane Academic Hospital (in Gauteng), Port Elizabeth Provincial and Nelson Mandela Academic Hospitals (both in East Cape) will start testing shortly.

In addition to the six testing sites, the NHLS has deployed six mobile laboratories to collect samples for testing. The four mobile laboratories have been deployed as follows:

- **One** in Western Cape;
- **Two** in Free State; and
- **One** in Kwazulu-Natal.
- **Two** in Gauteng

Twenty (20) more mobile vehicles have been procured and will be deployed in April.

With all the five sites functional, the NHLS has the capacity to process 5000 samples in 24 hours. This number will increase to 15,000 in 24 hours in April. At the end of April, the NHLS will be able to process approximately 36 000 test in 24 hours.

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About the NHLS

The NHLS is the largest diagnostic pathology service in South Africa, with the responsibility of supporting the national and provincial health departments in the delivery of healthcare. The NHLS provides laboratory and related public health services to over 80% of the population through a national network of laboratories. Its activities comprise of diagnostic laboratory services, research, teaching and training, and production of sera for anti-snake venom, reagents and media. For more information, visit www.nhls.ac.za