PRESS RELEASE

Date: August 7, 2020
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COUNTY, UCSC PARTNER TO FURTHER EXPAND COVID-19 TESTING
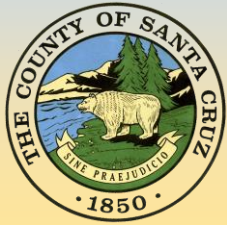*CARES Act funds, new equipment to increase daily testing capacity by hundreds*

SANTA CRUZ, CA–With funding provided through the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, the County of Santa Cruz and UC Santa Cruz are partnering to increase the community's resiliency and response to COVID-19.

Through an $805,000 purchase of additional laboratory equipment for the UCSC Molecular Diagnostic Lab, local testing capacity should increase to 600-800 tests per day once fully operational. The partnership will help address increased transmission in the community, and make Santa Cruz County more self-sufficient in its response through increased testing capacity and more rapid diagnosis.

"Addressing COVID-19 in the community demands that we rely on the strength of our partnerships, and this partnership will form the backbone of our response efforts when it comes to testing and diagnosis," Santa Cruz County Health Services Director Mimi Hall said. "We are thankful to have UC Santa Cruz in our community and to see them rise to meet the challenges before us."

A growing number of health organizations in the Santa Cruz area have begun turning to the UCSC Molecular Diagnostic Lab to provide testing for coronavirus infections. So far, the lab has been able to meet the demand for tests and continues to return results within 24 to 48 hours.

"We are grateful to the county for these funds, which will help ensure that our diagnostic lab continues to be able to meet the increasing needs of the community and campus for coronavirus testing," said Scott Brandt, vice chancellor for research at UC Santa Cruz.

In order to ensure seamless continuity with lab activities, it will take several weeks to integrate and test new equipment after it arrives. Ramping up to the new target for testing capacity must be done gradually and is likely to take several months.

The new equipment should allow for expanded testing by local providers, including additional contact tracing of asymptomatic patients. It includes two new robotic liquid handling platforms, a new PCR system, and a number of smaller items for the first stage in the process of ramping up the lab's testing capacity.

Testing to identify people infected with the coronavirus is crucial for controlling the pandemic. A surge in cases and shortages of some of the reagents needed for tests have strained the capacity of testing sites throughout the country, including commercial diagnostic laboratories, leading to delays in the reporting of test results.

The UCSC lab does not use the same suppliers as commercial labs and has not yet experienced any shortages of supplies or reagents.

The lab is currently partnering with the UCSC Student Health Center to provide testing for UCSC students and essential campus personnel and with Salud Para la Gente and Santa Cruz Community Health to provide testing for the area's low-income and vulnerable residents. In addition, the lab is partnering with Santa Cruz County Public Health and the Santa Cruz Community Foundation to provide testing for various local community medical providers and public service entities on a short term, immediate basis, to address emergency needs. UCSC is in the process of finalizing agreements with other local providers to expand testing capacity in support of the county's needs.

The UCSC lab tests samples sent to the lab from medical providers to determine if a patient is infected and does not treat patients or collect samples from patients directly. County residents should not contact UCSC to request testing and should work through local medical providers.