

# Minnesota's first COVID-19 saliva testing site opened in Duluth this past Wednesday

## New site will offer free saliva testing to anyone who needs it

Submitted by: Lareesa Sandresky,  
Lake County COVID-19 Communications Coordinator

The State of Minnesota today announced it will open a pilot saliva testing site on Wednesday at the Duluth Entertainment Convention Center (DECC). This testing site will be the first of its kind in Minnesota, offering free saliva tests to any Minnesotan who believes they need to be tested.

“Our battle against COVID-19 is far from over,” said Minnesota Health Commissioner Jan Malcolm. “The high number of new cases we’ve seen in recent days shows the outbreak could quickly spread out of control, so it’s important to stay a step or two ahead. Innovative partnerships are one of the ways we do that. This next milestone allows us to expand and diversify our testing options available to Minnesotans. Increased access to testing and identifying positive cases as early as possible is a critical way to keep schools and the economy as open as possible. While testing alone will not suppress the virus, higher testing volumes are a central part of our strategy to manage the virus.”

The state plans to open as many as nine more sites across the state like the one planned for the DECC. This pilot opening will give state and local health officials a chance to see what kind of demand to expect for the additional saliva test sites in coming weeks.

“The Duluth Entertainment Convention Center is an ideal place for this next milestone,” said Dan Huff, MDH assistant commissioner for health protection. “Regional centers across Minnesota are great places many people from more rural areas regularly access. As a population center and home to more than 20,000 college students, opening this site in Duluth will increase access to testing among people who need it.”

The Duluth site will be open five days a week, Wednesday through Friday from noon to 7 p.m., and Saturday and Sunday from 10 a.m. to 4 pm. While it is open to walk-ins, people are encouraged to register in advance to make an appointment if they’re able, to prevent crowding and long lines. Appointments can be made through the registration website. Thirty minutes of free parking in the lot outside the testing site is available to anyone who drives to the testing site.

Testing is free to all Minnesotans who believe they need a COVID-19 test, including those who do not have symptoms. While they will be asked about their insurance, this is so the state can bill the insurance company. If a person does not have insurance or insurance doesn’t cover some or all of the cost, the state will cover the difference so testing remains completely free to everyone.

Results are typically provided by email within 24-48 hours of arriving at the lab for processing.

“I am deeply grateful to the Governor and the Minnesota Department of Health for choosing Duluth as one of these innovative, low barrier, critical testing sites,” said Duluth Mayor Emily Larson. “The DECC facility is easy to access for residents, visitors, and those across our region, and will be a great addition to the testing sites provided by our local hospitals.”

“Having this type of access to testing is another big step forward,” said St. Louis County Commissioner Patrick Boyle who chairs the county’s Health and Human Services Committee and is a nurse practitioner. “This saliva testing site removes barriers to testing for many people, whether they are uncomfortable coming to a medical clinic, don’t have insurance, or are anxious or uncomfortable about the nasal swab. And the testing site itself can offer a less intimidating experience, because they don’t require a large number of trained professionals, equipped with layers of personal protective equipment, or PPE.”

“The DECC is excited to partner with the State of Minnesota and Vault Health to be the first COVID saliva testing site in the State of Minnesota,” DECC Interim Execu-

tive Director Roger Reinert said. “This is perfectly aligned with the public part of our mission as a public authority. Palucci Hall is the ideal location for the testing site within the DECC footprint. It allows for easy entry and exit, as well as contained space within the facility. We continue to actively market the remainder of the DECC’s 800,000 square feet of indoor space for multi-usage.”

Those who come for a test should avoid eating, drinking, chewing, or smoking anything for at least 30 minutes before providing a sample. Once at the site, they will self-administer the test by spitting into a funnel attached to a small tube. Clinic staff will be available on-site to monitor the collection process and ensure there is enough saliva to be tested.

“Our saliva test is one of the most reliable COVID tests available with a 99% effective rate,” said Jason Feldman, co-Founder and CEO of Vault Health. “It’s comfortable to take and can be done without in-person interactions, meaning no risk of virus transmission and no need for PPE to conduct the test. Minnesota is truly leading the way in unlocking testing for everyone.”

Vault Health will operate the Duluth site, as the team has experience running sites like this all across the country. Vault is hiring local staff to work at the testing sites and lead daily operations. For now, the tests will be shipped to Vault Health’s New Jersey lab; however, Minnesota’s partnership includes the creation of a saliva testing lab in Minnesota. Once the lab opens in Oakdale in mid-October, saliva tests will be processed in Minnesota. When running at full capacity, the new lab will be capable of processing as many as 30,000 samples a day.

“Our strategy for managing the virus continues to be proactive, data-driven, and aggressive,” Huff said. “A higher testing capacity, combined with masking, social distancing, and staying home in isolation when appropriate, is critical to that strategy. Our work to bring saliva testing to Minnesotans is an important supplement to the COVID-19 testing options already offered across the state. Growing and diversifying our testing options is a tool to keeping Minnesotans safe.”

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- 1035 Main St, BB, MLS6089682 Lot/Land. Spacious lot in Beaver Bay right off of Hwy 61, w/power, city water & sewer hookups & view of Lake Superior. A great place to build your new home! Feel free to walk the property. **\$55,000**
- XXX Hwy 61 & Onion River Rd. MLS6005052: 18 Acr. comm. resort bldg site between Tofto & Lutsen on Onion River Rd. Views of Lk Sup. High ground w/pwr at rd. Close to Sup. Hiking trl & rec. activities. **\$173,500**
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