



**MAYOR BARAKA LAUNCHES CITY-WIDE COVID-19 TESTING
FOR NEWARK'S ENTIRE HOMELESS POPULATION**

Initiative is first of its kind of New Jersey; Those who test positive will be quarantined

NEWARK – May 4, 2020 – Mayor Ras J. Baraka and the City of Newark today announced the launching of a program to offer mass COVID-19 testing to its entire homeless population. The program is the first of its kind in the state of New Jersey and perhaps the nation.

The testing began today at an airport hotel with which the City partnered last month as part of Mayor Baraka's \$1 million investment in rapid, short-term housing for Newark's most vulnerable residents. That initiative was designed to get residents without addresses in safe quarters to help slow the person-to-person COVID-19 spread among those living outdoors and the people with whom they come in contact.

"This was a critical part of our strategy," Mayor Baraka said. "We had to get our residents without addresses off the street and inside for their own safety and the safety of others. We were able to encourage many of them to come indoors, and today we start testing those who have so far been asymptomatic, to gather more data about how this disease has spread."

At the airport hotel all 194 residents will be offered tests today. Later in the week, there will be testing at the largest Newark homeless shelter and eventually residents at all 21 shelters will be offered tests. Once the results are back, anyone who has tested positive will be quarantined for 14 days under medical supervision, unless they need to be hospitalized, and then returned to their original shelters.

The testing will be done by the City's Department of Health and Community Wellness Mary Eliza Mahoney Federally Qualified Health Center, under the direction of Dr. Mark Wade, the head of the department.

Dr. Wade estimated there are about 2,200 residents without addresses in Newark and under Mayor Baraka's program more than 1,800 are being sheltered daily.

"I think we have collectively been successful in helping these residents without addresses to understand the gravity of the COVID-19 crisis and are getting them to safety, which is not always an easy thing to do," Dr. Wade said. "This has been a novel, life-saving approach and I don't know of another major city in the country that has done this."

This initiative is collaboratively supported by Salvation Army, Bridges Inc. Outreach and Engagement, the Newark Homeless Coalition, the Essex Continuum of Care and the Newark Homeless Commission.

Dr. Wade also said the City will utilize a new, less intrusive anterior nasal swabbing method that will be more comfortable for the residents, quicker to apply and safer for the medical staff. Every staff member at every shelter will also be tested.

Dr. Wade said the City's Contact Tracing Task Force will handle any new positive cases from the homeless testing, to try to follow the patterns of where they have been and with whom they have had contact. The task force will begin its expanded work tomorrow with hopes of tracing about 500 cases a day.

"This is what we need to truly understand this disease, how it is spread and what we must continue to do to stop it," said Mayor Baraka. "Contract tracing is one of the most important weapons we have."