



****FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****
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Health Department Efforts to Slow COVID-19 Spread among Vulnerable Populations

HAMILTON COUNTY, TN – The Hamilton County Health Department reports 71 new positive cases of COVID-19 today, bringing the total number of confirmed cases to 843. Of the 71 new cases, the vulnerable Hispanic population accounts for 49 cases. Of the total cases to date, Hispanics make up 65% of the total positive cases. In recognition of this vulnerable population, the Health Department has been and is conducting significant efforts to test, educate, and prevent further spread of COVID-19.

“Health Department staff are working very hard to reach and protect vulnerable populations that are disproportionately affected by this pandemic,” said Health Department Administrator Becky Barnes, “People are coming for testing so the message is reaching them.”

According to the CDC, “vulnerable populations” include those who have difficulty communicating (e.g., language barriers or speech and hearing impaired), accessing medical care, maintaining independence, or in accessing transportation.

Some of the Health Department efforts to reach and protect vulnerable populations are:

- Collaborating with organizations in the area that have strong existing ties with Hispanic communities, such as LaPaz and Clinica Medicos.
- Creating a [Spanish Facebook page](#) and posting videos with testing and prevention information in Spanish.
- Opening COVID-19 testing sites near neighborhoods with high density of Hispanic homes.
- Sending Spanish messages through the Hamilton County Department of Education school alert system.
- Hiring 12 bilingual teachers to add to their 48 bilingual staff that assist with case investigations and contact tracing.
- Delivering boxes of free masks, as well as educational materials and signs, to businesses frequented or owned by Spanish speaking residents.
- Engaging with Spanish speaking faith-based leaders and business owners via Zoom video sessions to answer questions and provide information.
- Providing Spanish interpreted summaries of Health Department press briefings.
- Ensuring bilingual staff are available at all Health Department COVID-19 testing sites for ease of services.

The 71 most recent cases, regardless of ethnicity, are distributed over zip codes 37407 (23), 37412 (11), 37404 (8), 37343, 37363, and 37415 with 5 each, 37421 (4), 37411 (3), with the remaining zip codes being 1 or 0 of the new cases. For the total number of cases within all zip codes, readers can view the COVID-19 zip code map [here](#).

Until recently, whites were the most affected population group, currently at 40% of the total cases, while blacks represent 8%, Asians 1%, with Other or Not Yet Determined making up 51%.

[Health Department testing](#) this week was offered at two of the four new sites, East Lake Academy School and Hardy Elementary School. On Tuesday, 435 people were tested at these two sites, 39 were positive, yielding an 8.9% positivity rate. Of the 39 positives, 20 were Hispanic, 11 unknown race/ethnicity, and 8 were non-Hispanic. Twenty-eight people identified as white and 1 as black. Males made up 12 of the positive cases, with 27 positive females.

All demographic data relating to COVID-19 testing of Hamilton county residents can be found on their [website](#).

While the current trend may show the Hispanic population is one of the most vulnerable, all persons are at risk of being infected by the COVID-19 respiratory disease. It is vitally important that everyone wear a mask in public places, adhere to the [Tennessee Pledge guidelines](#) for their specific business or organization, and continue practicing social distancing. Frequent hand washing and hand sanitizing is still some of the best protection.

Free Health Department drive-up or walk-up testing is now located at East Lake Academy School, Hardy Elementary School, Brainerd High School, and Orchard Knob Elementary School on a rotating basis, including weekends, and the complete schedule can be found [here](#).

For questions or information about COVID-19 in Hamilton County, call the Health Department's hotline at (423) 209-8383.

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