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***** FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE *****

**Statement of Health Director Morgan Clark and Board of Health Vice Chair,
Dr. Susan Troyan, on the Variety COVID-19 Testing Options Available to the Public
August 10, 2020**

There is a great deal of interest in the type of COVID-19 testing that is currently available to the public, especially for those who have no symptoms, but may have been exposed to the coronavirus through work or social contact. If people have any symptoms of COVID-19, they can go to their medical provider, get tested and insurance will cover the test. For those who are pre-symptomatic or asymptomatic and have a higher risk of exposure due to their job, it's very understandable that they would want to get a test that is reliable with a reasonably short turnaround to get their test result.

We want to provide a brief summary on the type of tests available to help people make an informed decision of the type of test which could work best for them. All testing for the virus causing COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2) has been allowed by the FDA by its Emergency Use Authorization (EUA). EUAs permit the FDA to allow the emergency use of drugs, devices, and medical products, including diagnostic tests, that were not previously approved, cleared, or licensed by FDA.

Here's a brief summary of what you need to know about the types of tests currently available to detect COVID-19:

RT- PCR Test – This tests directly for the virus by using a technology called PCR (polymerase chain reaction). This molecular test looks for COVID-19 viral RNA. The PCR technology greatly amplifies the viral genetic material to allow for detection when smaller amounts of virus are present. That material is detectable when a person is currently infected. Because the technology amplifies the virus genome to improve detection – it is seen as the earliest way to detect the presence of COVID-19. The test can use samples from the nose, airways, throat, and mouth.

Currently, there is one drawback of the PCR test. The chemical compounds that are used for the test are currently in short supply, which has caused delays of seven days or longer for test results.

Antigen Test – This tests directly for the COVID-19 virus by looking for proteins that are part of the virus, known as the antigens. The sample is also taken from the respiratory area – the nose, throat, and mouth. This test cannot amplify the sample as in PCR testing, but a reliable diagnosis comes when more antigen, a larger virus load, is in the sample. This circumstance commonly occurs once someone becomes symptomatic. Information on when this might occur in asymptomatic people is lacking. Antigen tests are usually used for symptomatic patients during the first five days of presenting symptoms.

Due to the amount of viral load needed to determine a positive result, if a person receives a negative antigen test, they might not be clear of COVID-19. In addition, if someone has a positive test result, it is recommended that they follow up with a PCR test.

Antibody Test – This tests indirectly for COVID-19 by looking for antibodies to the coronavirus in your blood. The blood sample may be taken by fingerstick or blood draw. Your body produces antibodies in response to an infectious agent such as a virus. These antibodies generally arise four days to more than a week after initial symptoms, so the reliability of this test is greater the longer it has been since a person was exposed to COVID-19. This test will indicate if someone has had the virus at some point but cannot tell the difference between currently having the virus or having had it in the past. It is not recommended as an early detection test as the reliability increases 7 days to 10 days after the start of symptoms.

If an asymptomatic person tests positive for antibodies, then a PCR test is recommended to see if they currently have COVID.

Finally, the CareWell facility in Dennis has handled testing for many asymptomatic members of our community not related to contact tracing. Here are the CareWell tests, the out of pocket expenses, and turnaround times:

- Asymptomatic Antigen test (nasal swab) - \$160, results are available in 15 minutes at the CareWell office
- Asymptomatic PCR (nasal swab) - \$160, results are available in 10-14 days from CareWell's commercial laboratory partner
- Antibody test - \$50, results are available in 48 hours from CareWell's commercial laboratory partner

When it comes to choosing the most reliable test to check your health status, we feel it's important for people to know where the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) stands on testing. According to a recent Cape Cod Times article, DPH prefers the molecular polymerase chain reaction test (PCR) over antigen testing as a department spokesman said, 'molecular tests are the gold standard and, when specimens are taken and handled properly, seem to have the fewest false positives and negatives.'

In addition, when it comes to the state travel order, DPH requires that if someone requests an exemption by offering a negative test, it must be a negative molecular PCR test. If someone

chooses an antigen test, they must then confirm the negative antigen result with a negative result from a molecular PCR test. Those seeking to completely avoid quarantine must produce a negative molecular PCR test on a sample obtained 72 hours or less prior to arrival in Massachusetts.