



**COUNTY OF DEL NORTE**  
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES  
PUBLIC HEALTH BRANCH

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**SUBJECT:** To Del Norte County Residents

Time for another COVID update. A lot has been going on since the last bulletin from us, so here are the high points.

**Testing:** We have a new state-sponsored testing service, OptumServe, which started last Friday. OptumServe is using a mobile minibus (about the size of a large food truck). It's painted blue, with orange markings, and lots of signage about COVID-19. I tried the service myself over the weekend, and it went pretty smoothly. Like Verily, there is an online sign up process, and the link is at our website (and posted below as well). It took a little longer, as there were more questions, and like Verily, the site collects insurance information. OptumServe creates a unique patient ID number, and it is important to copy this number down when it is created for you, as apparently you will need this every time you get tested. There is also a requirement for a password and username. If you have trouble signing in online, there is a helpline that can enroll you over the phone (also posted below).

The test itself is a little different as well. As we have mentioned on the radio, the OptumServe test is a drive up test, not drive through. Your test time is scheduled for a half hour window (I chose 8:00-8:30) and I was there at about 8:20. A couple of people showed up behind me in a socially distanced line while I checked in at the canopy next to the bus, and then an OptumServe staffer walked me around the back of the bus, under an awning. I was handed a swab, just like Verily, except I was standing outside. I swabbed myself, handed it back and went on my way. Pretty simple. In Crescent City, the site will be at the Front Street Park playground, on the back parking lot, Thursday, Friday and Saturday. On Tuesdays they will relocate to Smith River, at the old Ray's Food Place parking lot, and on Wednesday, they will be in Klamath at the Holiday Inn Express hotel (depending on the slide, of course.) They take appointments from 8-4.

As I mentioned, I was tested Saturday, and I got my results this morning. I had asked to be prompted by a text to my phone, but to get the results I logged back into the site, put in my username and password, and got the results to my computer. I did not try getting the results with my phone, but I think that is an option.

Please use this testing service. The minibus can handle up to 84 tests a day, and we really want to get to that number. If the service is not used enough, then we will lose it. The state health department wants to help us, but not at the expense of another part of California that might use the minibus to full capacity.

Vaccinations: We are still doing appointment only clinics, mostly for the targeted groups of tier 1b. We did a clinic on Saturday that had almost 440 people vaccinated with the Moderna vaccine. A lot were second doses, but not all, and we are pretty confident that we can expand a bit further next time. In addition, we are getting a little more vaccine and as was mentioned last week, Rite-Aid has been using Pfizer vaccines sent to their parent company directly from the Federal government. We are very happy that they have been able to roll our vaccine locally, and we hope other pharmacies will be able to follow soon. We are continuing to supply local medical offices as well. We had a meeting with Blue Shield last week, who is now the contracted “third party administrator” for the state of California. They will be deciding a lot of technical stuff about vaccine distribution going forward, and they make recommendations to the state. They will be assisting us and perhaps coming up with additional means for vaccinating on our behalf. That project has a ways to go, but part of it will be enrolling in the statewide vaccination appointment program (My Turn) that should be up and running at least in part, sometime in the next few weeks.

The Future: We are holding in the Red Tier, and we think that we will remain there, but the numbers of cases we have are pretty close to getting us in trouble. We have to continue to be vigilant, as much as possible. Spring fever is starting early because we are all tired of COVID and we really cannot give in too early to the temptation to relax our guard.

The main reason this is still true is that even with vaccines in hand and a good portion of the population infected and recovered, the virus variants are definitely out there and may be here any day, they might even be here now, and we have just not detected them. Most COVID tests don't distinguish the variants from the ordinary virus, and the process to do that is complicated. We are in the process of setting up some sampling of our local tests to be sent for specialized testing, on a regular basis. It would probably be the only way that we could detect a variant of the virus in time to get the word out.

And for now, we need to continue everything that we have been doing, even though there are some slight changes in some of the guidelines from the state health department that hint that things are trending downward. The reason for this is that we are not quite to the point where we have enough people vaccinated or over the infection that we can really start to breathe easier. People still need to wear masks, still need to keep distance, still need to stay home when they are sick, still need to get tested when they are sick. Until we are dealing with these variants in full force, we won't really know whether enough has been done to ward them off or not. Some experts are saying that we are in the “eye of the hurricane” at the moment, and we should prepare for a fourth surge. I hope they are wrong, but they wouldn't be experts if they could not make some good predictions and these are the same people who predicted the surge we just got out of. I think it is prudent to listen to them, and pay attention to the warning. We have been fortunate enough to escape a lot of the tragedy that has hit other parts of the state and country, and we don't want to stumble at the end.

So stay safe, and stay masked! Even if you have been vaccinated, we want you to take the same precautions until we know for sure that you can relax the guard. We are just not quite there yet.

**Register online at: <https://hi.care/covidtesting> or by calling (888) 634-1123**

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