

What is NET Health's Involvement with COVID-19 in East Texas?

The Northeast Texas Public Health District, also known as NET Health, provides weekday reports of any and all new COVID-positive cases of residents within the counties of Smith, Gregg, Wood, Rains, Van Zandt, Henderson, and Anderson. Our Disease Surveillance Division receives notice of COVID-positive results analyzed at testing labs who receive test samples from mobile testing sites, hospitals, and community clinics.

Our current updates of new daily COVID-19 cases **DO NOT** include positive antibody tests. All of the laboratory-confirmed positive COVID-19 results received by NET Health are positive-PCR test results. Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) samples are either the nasal swab or the oral swab; both target the back of the sinuses, and both testing modalities consistently result in valid and reliable testing results.

The free mobile testing locations organized by the Texas Division of Emergency Management (TDEM) do not offer antibody testing. The mobile testing locations offer either the nasal swab or an oral saliva test because these are the method that has the highest validity, and these are the methods that can confirm if a person actively has COVID-19. An antibody test can be used to show that you may have had COVID-19 at some point in the past, but it does not indicate a person has an active case of COVID-19.

If a person has a positive antibody test, they are strongly encouraged to seek a PCR test for COVID-19.

The Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) has issued a guidance document that explains why PCR testing is being used across the state in the report of active COVID-positive test results, and this document is accessible from the ["Local Testing Options" page of NETHealthCOVID19.org](https://www.dshs.texas.gov/covid-19/local-testing-options).

Attribution of COVID-positive Individuals to a Specific County

If a person tests positive for COVID-19, then the case is attributed to the county where that individual lives, and not based on where the test was performed. For example, if a Smith County resident has a COVID-19 test obtained in a different county or even in a different state, NET Health would still be notified by the testing laboratory that a Smith County resident testing positive for COVID-19.

Persons may live in one county but travel to a different county to have a COVID-19 test. The number of new cases announced by NET Health each day are only based upon the physical residences of each individual, and not based upon the location of the testing locations.

The cities of Bullard, Troup, Overton, and Kilgore are examples of individual municipalities whose city limits span into multiple counties. The GPS location of a person's physical residence and that physical location's mailing address determines which city and county is attributed to having a COVID-19 case.

Positive and Negative COVID-19 Test Results in East Texas

As stated previously within this guidance document, the Disease Surveillance Division of NET Health receives notice of only the COVID-positive results analyzed at testing laboratories. Each laboratory receives a multitude of COVID-19 samples from numerous cities and counties every day and the efficiency of resources is devoted to the streamlined analysis of received test samples.

All COVID-19 statistics within our 7-county region are the total number of unduplicated persons. If an individual is tested for COVID-19 at more than one testing location, they are only counted once, whether it is a positive antigen test, a positive antibody test, or a positive PCR test.

The Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) maintains the total number of COVID-19 tests (both negative test results and positive test results) that have been provided to residents of each county. The analysis by testing laboratories categorizes these statistics by the county of residence for the person whose samples are being tested. For example, a resident of Smith County may have attended a free TDEM mobile testing location in Gregg County and all of the samples were sent to a DSHS-operated testing laboratory in Austin. In this example, if this Smith County resident's test result was positive, NET Health would receive notification of this person's COVID-positive laboratory results, but NET Health would not receive any notification if this person tested negative for COVID-19 at that specific testing location. View the "Cumulative Number of Tests Over Time" link that lists each county's residents whom have been tested by visiting <https://dshs.texas.gov/coronavirus/additionaldata/>.

Performing the Contact Tracing Process with Newly-Confirmed COVID-Positive Individuals

Whenever any reportable condition is reported to our Disease Surveillance Division (COVID-19, Ebola, Botulism, Legionella, etc.), NET Health conducts the following procedures:

- The physical residence of the individual with the condition is determined; NET Health confirms the appropriate jurisdiction of the case and the appropriate health department is notified
- A review of lab results may involve interviews with the infected individual (i.e., the subject) to determine their exposures within the public.
- If an individual is suspected to have been in close contact with a COVID-positive person, then that individual is contacted by our Disease Surveillance Division, clinical exposure information is collected as a part of the contact tracing process.
- If it is determined that, at any point, persons had an exposure to a confirmed case within the days that the subject was contagious, those persons will be given specific instructions about the proper ways to self-isolate at home.
- NET Health then notifies those close contacts, in order to keep those additional potential contacts and the general public safe from the spread of COVID-19.

When Does a Person Become Recognized as “Recovered” from COVID-19?

The definition of a person with symptoms of COVID-19 being recognized as “Recovered” occurs when ALL THREE of the following criteria are met:

- at least 14 days have passed since symptoms first appeared
- the individual has noticeable improvement in symptoms (e.g., cough, shortness of breath, etc.)
- for persons who work in a health care setting: at least 3 days (72 hours) being fever-free without the use of fever-reducing medications [for persons who do not work in a health care setting, there is a minimum of 8 days (192 hours) being fever-free without the use of fever-reducing medication]

Asymptomatic individuals who tested positive for COVID-19 must self-isolate at their residence and monitor their symptoms for a 14-day period that begins *when their test samples were collected*.

The above determination includes when the individual can resume previous activities, such as returning to work, participating in organized sports, and their normal activities of daily living.

The official determination of a COVID-positive individual being classified as recovered is based on available medical research of the recovery times of early COVID-19 patients, and is established by a joint decision-making process that includes the individual's primary care provider, epidemiologists within NET Health's Disease Surveillance Division, and the Smith County Health Authority.

Medical Providers and Testing Laboratories Reporting a COVID-Positive Patient

The Northeast Texas Public Health District (NET Health) is ready to assist physicians and health providers to remain updated on the process of reporting COVID-positives and to give guidance to patients that may have questions for you and your staff.

If you are a practicing physician, nurse, or any primary care provider who has tested a patient for COVID-19 using a PCR test and a positive result occurs, you will need to prepare these 3 documents:

- the **actual laboratory result that shows the person is positive for COVID-19**
- the **visit notes (a.k.a., a sheet that outlines the doctor's notes)** indicating their clinical information, any exposure history or sick contacts, etc.
- the **patient's face sheet* (a.k.a. the patient's demographics)** with the person's valid phone number**, race, gender, and physical address* (not a P.O. Box)

* Public Health needs the person's physical address for us to notify EMS, in the event they may have to respond to the patient's house for a medical emergency, so they can know what level of PPE to wear.

** We need the patient's phone number for us to be able to do contract tracing with them.

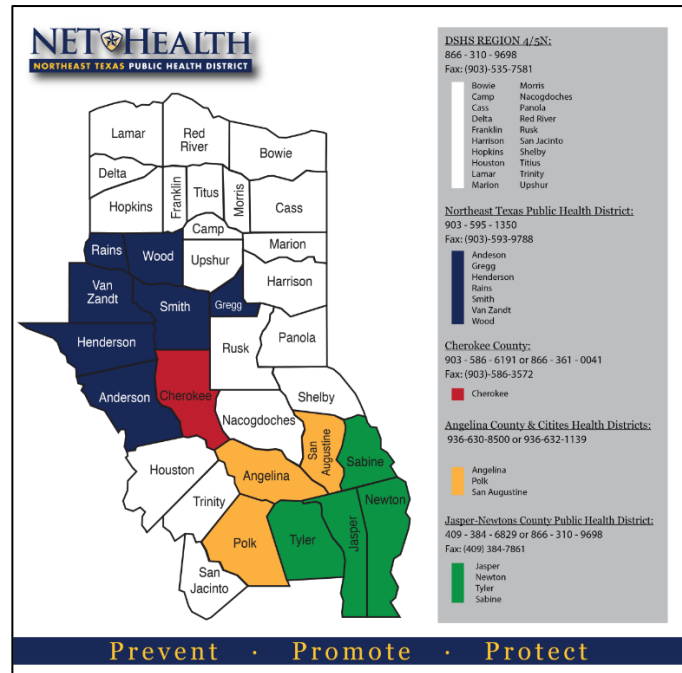
Regional Map for Reporting COVID-Positive Patients to Your Local Health Department:

NET Health covers a 7-county area, indicated in blue within the below map. Reporting cases to the appropriate health department is determined by the patient's address.

For example, if the patient lives in Tyler, which is within Smith County, then this case would need to be reported to us. There are a few cities that straddle a few different counties, such as Longview (Gregg, Harrison, and Rusk Counties), Bullard (Smith County and Cherokee County), Gladewater (Gregg, Upshur, and Smith Counties), et. al.

To make sure the COVID-positive report is distributed to the proper health department, you and your staff will need to determine the exact GPS address of the person's permanent residence. MapQuest is one map-friendly website that shows the county lines, but Google Maps does not. When you type the address into MapQuest and then zoom out, you can then view the county lines.

Another option is to encourage your admissions staff to always ask each patient to indicate their permanent physical residence and leave a notation within the patient's records (ex. "Patient verified they live within the boundary of Cherokee County").



Physician's Notification of COVID-positive cases to Your Local Health Department

Send an initial email to ContactUs@netphd.org and you will receive a reply with instructions on how to securely scan and email the aforementioned three documents directly to NET Health.

You may also fax the three necessary documents to our fax number: (903) 593 - 7988.

For all other health departments in East Texas, you can fax to the appropriate fax numbers that are listed below and are outlined within the above graphic, based upon the physical residence of the patient.

Fax Numbers (as listed on the attached graphic):

- Northeast Texas Public Health District : (903) 593 - 7988
- Cherokee County Health Department : (903) 586 -3572
- Jasper Newton County Public Health District : (409) 384 - 7861
- DSHS Region 4/5 North : (903) 535 - 7581 (serves as a backup option for all other jurisdictions)

Companies and Schools Reporting a COVID-Positive Employee to their Local Health Department

As described previously, it is required to notify the NET Health Disease Surveillance Division when a person who is COVID-positive. The person's physician, or the facility that analyzed the person's COVID-19 test samples, should provide every client with a physical copy of their COVID-positive laboratory results, or with access for the client to access their lab results electronically.

Every employee that receives a COVID-positive lab result should immediately notify their employer. If the employee is currently at their worksite upon receiving confirmation of a COVID-positive lab result, they should not be allowed to remain at the worksite, the employee should notify everyone at their residence of their COVID-positive test result, and then begin immediate self-isolation at their residence.

If the employee is not at work upon receiving confirmation of a COVID-positive lab result, they should not physically come to work and should begin self-isolation at their residence.

If it is your company's protocol to contact your local health department because you have recently learned of an employee or of a client who is COVID-positive, send an email to ContactUs@netphd.org.

You will receive a reply with instructions on how to securely email a weekly report to NET Health.

It is also important for your company to maintain an active roster of all employees who are confirmed COVID-positive and of persons awaiting COVID test results, as this is the element of the contact tracing that assists your employees in controlling the spread of COVID-19 among your workforce.

Employers Requesting COVID-Positive Employees to Obtain Negative COVID-19 Results Before the Employee is Allowed to Return to Work (Post-Diagnostic Testing is No Longer Recommended)

NET Health comprehends the concerns that companies have about the health of their employees, their customers, and their community. NET Health has received an overwhelming number of reports from employees that their company is requiring their employees to provide evidence of a negative COVID-19 test before they can return to work after being diagnosed with COVID-19.

On Friday, July 17th, 2020, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) stress that there is no longer a need for persons with a laboratory-confirmed COVID-positive test to have a negative COVID-19 follow-up test after a 14-day period of home isolation or quarantine from their work setting.

After an individual is diagnosed as COVID-positive, the CDC no longer recommends the need for negative tests, as outlined within national directives to instead use the symptom-based strategy.

NET Health has educated many business employers that the process of requiring 2 negative tests before a COVID-positive employee can return to work has become a logistical challenge for clinical staff, and more importantly, for testing laboratories that are depleting their supply of testing resources, attempting to decrease any backlog of tests not yet analyzed, and trying to maintain capacity when there's been high demand and high case levels. Access the appropriate link below to view the specified CDC guidance:

Non-Healthcare Settings (School campuses, Daycares, Worksites, Non-Profits, etc.)

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/disposition-in-home-patients.html>

Healthcare Personnel (Employees of Hospitals, Medical Facilities, Clinics, Nursing Homes, etc.)

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/return-to-work.html>

COVID-Positive Employees & Protocols for Return-to-Work Testing

CDC, DSHS, and NET Health are encouraging employers to consider ways to support the health of their employees, including implementing flexible sick leave, social distancing, routine environmental cleaning and disinfection, videoconferencing, telework, and other supportive policies. NET Health is not recommending COVID-19 return-to-work testing to be required, as this is in alignment with guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Texas Workforce Commission, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, and the Texas Department of State Health Services.

These recommendations apply to any business or organization that has employees and/or volunteers, who are all advised to follow the symptom-based strategy that is described in the previous “Recovered from COVID-19” section. The CDC has compiled evidence that supports when a COVID-positive individual can and should end isolation, that not only incorporates recent evidence to inform the duration of isolation and precautions recommended to prevent transmission of COVID-19, but also, and more importantly, limits the unnecessary use of laboratory testing resources.

Key Findings within CDC’s Recent Updates for Duration of Isolation of COVID-19 Individuals

- Concentrations of COVID-19 measured from a person’s upper respiratory system (nose, throat, mouth) decline after onset of symptoms (CDC, unpublished data, 2020; Midgley et al., 2020; Young et al., 2020; Zou et al., 2020; Wölfel et al., 2020; van Kampen et al., 2020).
- A large nationwide contact tracing study demonstrated that high-risk household and hospital contacts did not develop infection if their exposure to a case patient started 6 days or more after the case patient’s illness onset (Cheng et al., 2020).
- Recovered patients can continue to have COVID-19 detected in their upper respiratory system for up to 12 weeks (Korea CDC, 2020; Li et al., 2020; Xiao et al, 2020). Investigation of 285 “persistently positive” persons, which included 126 persons who had developed recurrent symptoms, found no secondary infections among 790 contacts attributable to contact with these case patients (Korea CDC, 2020).
- Currently, 6 months after the emergence of SARS-CoV-2, there have been no confirmed cases of SARS-CoV-2 reinfection. However, the number of areas where sustained infection pressure has been maintained, and therefore reinfections would be most likely observed, remains limited.
- COVID antibodies and other measures of immunity have not yet been established.

Hospitalization Data in East Texas

The Smith County Emergency Operations Center provides a weekday update of a variety of COVID-19 statistics that outline active cases, recovered individuals, and demographics of all confirmed cases.

The upper right corner of the COVID-19 dashboard for Smith County contains the daily updated statistic of East Texas citizens who are currently hospitalized within a medical facility in Tyler and are being treated for symptoms related to recent COVID-19 infection.

View the “Cumulative Number of Tests Over Time” document that maintains an updated listing of each county’s residents whom have been tested by visiting <https://dshs.texas.gov/coronavirus/additionaldata/>.

Local Options for Antibody Testing

Anyone who wishes to donate blood and to have an antibody test (a.k.a. a serologic test) can visit the Red Cross, which has locations in Longview and in Tyler. Antibody testing will verify previous exposure to COVID-19 and does not confirm that you actively have COVID-19.

While COVID-19 may no longer be detectable in some people, an antibody test can reveal which geographic areas are vulnerable. The test results will be provided to the individual blood donor and eventually to public health thus adding to the greater body of knowledge.

Learn more by accessing this link on the Red Cross' website:

<https://www.redcrossblood.org/donate-blood/dlp/covid-19-antibody-testing.html>

Carter BloodCare also tests every donation for COVID-19 antibodies, and the call for increased blood donation can now include the sell for potential donors to know that their donation will be automatically tested for antibodies of COVID-19.

Learn more by accessing this link on Carter BloodCare's website:

<https://www.carterbloodcare.org/now-offering-covid-19-antibody-testing-for-blood-donors/>

Recovered COVID-19 Individuals Can Donate Plasma for Convalescent Therapy

Antibody testing will also determine the levels of COVID-19 related antibodies and potentially find new candidates for convalescent plasma therapy.

Anyone who has tested positive for COVID-19, has been symptom free/ recovered for 14 days, and is interested in helping current COVID-positive individuals who are hospitalized should strongly consider donating their plasma for convalescent plasma therapy at the Carter BloodCare location in Tyler.

Persons who acquired COVID-19 and are fully recovered are encouraged to donate plasma at Carter BloodCare:


<https://www.carterbloodcare.org/plasma-donations-for-treating-covid-19/>

Carter BloodCare

SHARING YOUR IMMUNITY ... GIVING HOPE




DONATING YOUR COVID-19 CONVALESCENT PLASMA

Plasma collected from individuals like you that have recently recovered from COVID-19, can provide hope to a currently ill COVID-19 patient. Even though it is still experimental, convalescent plasma has been approved for emergency use in the management of COVID-19.

 EACH DONATION COULD HELP THREE PATIENTS

WE NEED TO SEE **40 donors** DAILY TO KEEP UP WITH THE LOCAL PATIENTS' NEEDS

requirements for convalescent plasma donors:

-  HAVE HAD A POSITIVE TEST RESULT FOR COVID-19 OR ANTIBODIES
-  NO SYMPTOMS FOR 14 DAYS
-  MEET REGULAR BLOOD DONATION GUIDELINES

YOU CAN GIVE PLASMA EVERY **14** DAYS

ARE YOU READY TO SAVE LIVES?

Visit the Carter BloodCare website to check eligibility and register.

[carterbloodcare.org](https://www.carterbloodcare.org)

#GiveForLife

Public Testing Options that are Free

NET Health is not involved in the process of analyzing COVID-19 tests.

The free-to-the-public COVID-19 mobile testing sites are operated by the Texas Division of Emergency Management (TDEM). Persons seeking to obtain their test results from any of the free TDEM testing sites are asked to send an email to help@txcovidtest.org.

Persons seeking COVID-19 testing must first call your healthcare provider and tell them about your symptoms and your exposure, before you make the trip. If you have symptoms of COVID-19, and/or believe you have been exposed to someone with COVID-19, directly contact your doctor and inform the clinic/hospital that you are about to travel to their facility, before actually traveling to that facility.

Anyone without a medical provider can call our COVID-19 Call Center that is available for uninsured citizens of Smith County Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. Speak with a Community Health Worker by calling (903) 617 – 6404.

Chance of Transmission	Symptomatic & Asymptomatic	Asymptomatic Person
VERY HIGH		
HIGH		
MEDIUM		
LOW		
VERY LOW		
VIRTUALLY NONE		