



HFSC to contract with private lab for weekly COVID-19 testing for staff

July 2, 2020

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Houston Forensic Science Center is contracting with a private laboratory to do weekly COVID-19 testing for staff members after at least 10 employees tested positive, putting a strain on operations.

The Bode Technology Group will begin testing at HFSC's downtown facility on Monday and has committed to providing test results within 48 to 72 hours after collection, a timeframe that allows for better mitigation of the virus' spread.

"We have a dual goal of protecting the health and safety of our staff and continuing our essential operation throughout this pandemic," said Dr. Peter Stout, HFSC's CEO and president. "We can do neither when nearly 50 percent of people are asymptomatic, and we are waiting a week or more for test results. By contracting with Bode, we will have results in a timeframe that allows us to quickly get positive staff members offsite."

At least 10 HFSC employees have tested positive for COVID-19 and about a dozen others are self-quarantined awaiting test results, about 10 percent of the total staff.

HFSC's relatively small staff size of about 200 people means an outbreak could easily halt operations. It also makes it easier for HFSC to contract with a private laboratory to screen employees.

HFSC will pilot this program in July to determine whether it more quickly identifies staff members positive for COVID-19, making it easier to slow the spread of infection.

“Currently, more than 10 percent of our staff is out of commission,” Dr. Stout said. “We respond to homicides and officer-involved shootings, some of the most heinous and high-profile crimes in the city. We must find a way to remain operable for the safety of the community, but we also have an obligation to ensure the safety of our staff.”

HFSC is a local government corporation that provides forensic services to the City of Houston and other local agencies. HFSC is overseen by a Board of Directors appointed by the Mayor of Houston and confirmed by the Houston City Council. Its management structure is designed to be responsive to a 2009 recommendation by the National Academy of Sciences that called for crime laboratories to be independent of law enforcement and prosecutorial branches of government.

HFSC operates in seven forensic disciplines.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Ramit Plushnick-Masti

Director of Communications/PIO

media@houstonforensicscience.org

www.houstonforensicscience.org

713-703-4898 (cell)

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