

For Immediate Release

December 3, 2020

Contact:

Erica Taylor 843-937-6303

Media Release

CCSD now has two methods to test for COVID-19

**Office of Strategy and
Communications**

Gerrita Postlewait, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

Erica S. Taylor
Chief of Staff

Charleston, SC – Charleston County School District (CCSD) will have the availability of two methods to test for COVID-19 at every school as soon as next week. A saliva test has been made possible thanks to a continued partnership with the Medical University of South Carolina's (MUSC) Infectious Disease Department. In addition, Rapid Antigen Testing has been made available to schools across the state, as announced by South Carolina Governor Henry McMaster last month. Those tests will be used in conjunction with the saliva test.

According to Ellen Nitz, CCSD's Director of Nursing Services, one of CCSD's biggest goals is to prevent the transmission of COVID-19 within the school setting.

"This testing allows for students or staff with symptoms to come into the clinic be tested using their saliva," said Nitz. "It is sent away and within 12 to 24 hours we will receive the results. At that point, we would let the patient know whether they can return to school or not."

The saliva tests have a 92 percent sensitivity (accuracy) rate. Results are sent in a text to the patient/guardian within 12-24 hours from MUSC.

Nitz explained that once the Rapid test is administered (with permission by a parent) results can be obtained in less than 15 minutes.

If a person is found to be positive schools will follow district protocols that are in place and begin contact tracing. A positive result will require the person to isolate for 10 days per DHEC protocol. Each school has identified an isolation area for students to wait for their parent/guardian to pick them up from school.

"The drawback is that have a lower sensitivity rate," said Nitz. "A positive test is a positive test. A child will automatically be sent home and contact tracing for the household and school immediately begins. But if a child tests negative with this test, we will do further testing using a PCR saliva test."

Nitz also explained that contact tracing does not start until confirmation of a positive test has been received. However, the staff does begin to gather information such as seating charts, etc., to be able to react rapidly and get information out to other families that may have been a close contact.

"We have DHEC trained contact tracers who can turn around cases within a couple of hours," said Nitz.

"The district works hard to continue to put layers of protection in for staff and students and this saliva test is one of those layers of protection," said Nitz. "First and foremost, everyone needs to keep their distance and wear a mask. The testing is secondary so we can test anyone who is symptomatic and maybe not sure if they have a seasonal cold or COVID-19. Having access to both tests is crucial to improving everyone's peace of mind and safety. It makes me feel more comfortable, as Director of Nursing, knowing we have these tools available."

Nitz said her biggest plea is that when a student or staff is sick, that they stay home, and if a person does test positive she insists that they follow the Department of Health and Environmental Control's protocols for isolation.

"We sincerely appreciate the support and guidance that MUSC has provided," said Nitz. "We are fortunate to be in partnership."

For more information contact the Office of Strategy and Communications at (843) 937-6303.

###

About the Charleston County School District

Charleston County School District (CCSD) is a nationally-accredited school district that is committed to providing equitable and quality educational opportunities for all of its students. CCSD is the second-largest school system in South Carolina and represents a unique blend of urban, suburban, and rural schools spanning 1,300 square miles along the coast. CCSD serves more than 50,000 students in 87 schools and specialized programs.

CCSD offers a diverse, expanding portfolio of options and specialized programs, delivered through neighborhood, magnet, IB (international baccalaureate), Montessori, and charter schools. Options include programs in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM); music and other creative and performing arts; career and technical preparation programs; and military.