

**Town of West Hartford and The Jackson Laboratory for Genomic Medicine
announce a new collaboration designed to improve COVID-19 testing for
West Hartford public safety**

WEST HARTFORD, CT (May 8, 2020) – On Friday, May 8, 2020, The Jackson Laboratory for Genomic Medicine (JAX-GM) of Farmington, CT, and the Town of West Hartford will announce a collaboration to improve COVID-19 testing for the Town’s first responders and their families.

The partnership allows West Hartford paramedics to test the Town’s first responders and bring their COVID-19 specimens directly to JAX for analysis. The test results will be turned around within 24 hours, a benchmark JAX-GM established when it began a testing partnership with the State of Connecticut in March. This will give police and fire leadership a more accurate understanding of how the virus impacts their workforce and allow for rapid test results as part of the analysis for who can, should, or should not be at work.

The collaboration was facilitated by Mayor Shari Cantor and Edison Liu, M.D., president and CEO of The Jackson Laboratory and Charles Lee, Ph.D., FACMG, scientific director of The Jackson Laboratory for Genomic Medicine. Plans came together quickly in March and West Hartford’s team navigated through some challenges, including obtaining limited testing supplies.

“I am so pleased that we can equip our paramedics with the tools to expedite testing of those who are on the front lines of this pandemic and who put their lives on the line for us every day. Keeping our first responders healthy and safe protects our community and is in the Town’s best interest,” said Mayor Shari Cantor.

“When we embarked on this program as a concept, we were facing real challenges with testing and an uncertainty over who in the ranks of the Fire and Police Departments may benefit from getting tested. Even as other testing options became available, we thought that this collaboration with The Jackson Laboratory for Genomic Medicine was important to improve our ability to understand conditions and maintain a healthy workforce,” said Fire Chief Greg Priest.

The result was the Public Safety COVID Testing (PSCT) program, which is being rolled out today in partnership with JAX. Whenever a first responder needs to be tested, he or she will go to Fire Station #2 on Brace Road. A swab or saliva sample would be taken, and then processed at JAX-

GM. Results are expected to be returned within a day. HIPPA protocols and Department of Public Health regulations are maintained at all times.

“Testing is one of the most important tools in our pandemic response toolkit – we need to drastically increase the amount of tests and speed of test results to properly battle COVID-19, especially among populations on the front line,” said Ed Liu, M.D., The Jackson Laboratory. “From breeding a crucial mouse model for COVID-19 research and helping ensure scientific continuity for researchers around the globe to ramping up our COVID-19 testing capabilities, JAX is committed to addressing the outbreak as quickly and effectively as possible. We are honored to partner with Mayor Cantor to ensure that West Hartford is able to keep its team safe, informed, and able to provide the crucial health and safety services West Hartford’s residents depend on.”

JAX’s Connecticut-licensed CLIA (Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendments) and CAP-accredited laboratory in Farmington had, until recently, focused on complex tumor profiling assays to help cancer patients and their clinicians learn more about specific tumors to try to identify the most appropriate treatment options for patients. When the pandemic hit, the nonprofit was quickly able to adapt its capabilities to now also test patient samples for a specific RNA signature unique to SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19.

“As an independent, nonprofit biomedical research institution, we are dedicated to improving human health, and this partnership is a wonderful example of how we can pursue our mission right here, in our own community,” said Charles Lee, Ph.D., FACMG, The Jackson Laboratory for Genomic Medicine. “It is of the utmost importance to us to serve our first responders and neighbors in West Hartford. As the COVID-19 pandemic evolves, we will continue adopting advanced technologies, incorporating new solutions and expanding our work to help fight the health crisis.”

A quick understanding of test results will be an additional tool to help keep first responders’ quarantines to a minimum, stabilize the workforce and offer support to their families. Each time a person is taken off-line, it puts stress on the whole department.

“Our obligation as leaders is to ensure that we have enough responders to fulfill our mission and at the same time trying to support and assist our responders and their families,” said Fire Chief Greg Priest.

Similar partnerships are occurring across the country. West Hartford Police Department Captain Kevin McCarthy brought to the attention of the town’s police administration the Seattle, Washington’s Public Safety COVID Testing program, upon which West Hartford’s is modeled. Seattle was one of the first locales to be hit the hardest early in the pandemic.

“This collaboration will greatly assist the town’s efforts to protect the health and safety of our public safety personnel and their loved ones,” said Police Chief Vernon Riddick.

West Hartford’s PSCT program was spearheaded by Emergency Management Services Officer Kristin Fillian who took the vision and created the protocol. Dr. Charles Johndro of Hartford Hospital who oversees West Hartford’s paramedics was a key advocate and facilitator, serving as the program director.

“Testing is one of the key elements of our way out of this pandemic,” said Aimee Krauss, director, West Hartford-Bloomfield Health District.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) says that as many as 25-35% of people with COVID-19 have no symptoms but are capable of spreading the illness to other people.

“The more we test, the more we know,” Krauss said.

About The Jackson Laboratory

The Jackson Laboratory is an independent, nonprofit biomedical research institution with more than 2,200 employees. Headquartered in Bar Harbor, Maine, it has a National Cancer Institute-designated Cancer Center, a genomic medicine institute in Farmington, Conn., and facilities in Ellsworth, Maine, Sacramento, Calif., and Shanghai, China. Its mission is to discover precise genomic solutions for disease and empower the global biomedical community in the shared quest to improve human health. For more information, please visit www.jax.org.

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