

Cuomo: New York to vet coronavirus vaccines

Speaking to the press on Thursday morning, Gov. Andrew Cuomo said New York will conduct its own review of potential coronavirus vaccines.

"On the issue of the vaccine, like everything else in this country, it's partisan and it's questioned and there's controversy about it," Cuomo said. "The way the federal government has handled the vaccine, there are now serious questions about whether or not the vaccine is politicized. There's been tremendous reporting on that, and the people of this country don't trust this federal government with this vaccine process. How can I say that? I didn't say that, Americans said it. Fifty-four percent say they wouldn't take the vaccine yet."

He explained, "The first question is, is the vaccine safe? Frankly, I'm not going to trust the federal government's opinion – and

I wouldn't recommend to New Yorkers based on the federal government's opinion. Second question is – if it is a safe vaccine – how do you implement it? Implementation is a massive undertaking.

"On the first question of is it safe, New York state will have its own review. When the federal government is finished with their review and says it's safe.

"We're going to put together our own review committee headed by the Department of Health that will advise me – we have the best hospitals and research facilities on the globe in this state. We're going to put together a group for them to review the vaccine, so I can look at the camera and I can say to New Yorkers that it's safe to take. I want to make sure that we know it's safe to take.

"If the vaccine is safe, then we have to decide how do you actually implement it. They're talking about two shots necessary for a

vaccine. We have 19.5 million New Yorkers. You're talking about 40 million doses being administered. You think what we went through thus far has been massive with the testing and the quarantine, etc. Administering a vaccine to every New Yorker? This is a massive undertaking and vaccines have to be stored at minus-80 degrees centigrade. You're going to have issues of public confidence, whether or not the vaccine is safe. We're not sure what the federal government's role is going to be. I don't think the federal government understands what its role is going to be. It's going to be a monumental undertaking in any event.

"I'm appointing a committee today that is going to come up with a vaccine distribution and implementation plan on how we will do it. The vaccine plan will include prioritization of the vaccine. Who gets the vaccine first

based on medical standards, not anything else. How do we distribute it, who can administer it, how can we train those people, how do we train them now? People have to get two doses; they have to get two of the same medicine in those dosages. You then have to keep track of everyone who is vaccinated, when and what vaccine they actually received. And there's going to have to be a massive public education campaign that talks people through this and how to do it.

"We're also going to have to buy it and it's going to be expensive. Who do we buy it from? I want to make sure we don't go through that same mess that we went through on PPE procurement, where everyone is trying buy it at the same period of time and we wind up driving up the price.

"What do we want to accomplish in New York? We should have the best vaccination program in the

United States of America. I think the way we have handled COVID has been a model for this country. I want New Yorkers to do the same thing with vaccines. We should be the model vaccination program in the country.

"I also think there's a tremendous advantage for any state that could be the first COVID-free state. How about the state that can say, 'Our population is vaccinated. We are the first COVID-free state.' What are the advantages to that statement in terms of public confidence, in terms of economic development, etc.? I mean, you feel now the advantages that New York has for having a lower infection rate: People want to come here, people feel safer here. What if we were the first state to fully vaccinate your entire population?"

"So, those would be the goals. We're going to start; we're going to start now."

Cuomo, Malatras announce FDA approval for COVID-19 saliva swab test

FDA approval enables test – currently used to test on all SUNY campuses – to be brought to greater scale statewide

Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo and State University of New York Chancellor Jim Malatras on Wednesday announced the individual saliva swab diagnostic test for COVID-19 developed by SUNY Upstate Medical University and Quadrant Biosciences has been granted emergency use authorization by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. While this test has been used to date to support SUNY's widespread testing of students across campuses, the emergency use authorization will help additional labs begin to use this test, helping pinpoint and contain the virus and protect New Yorkers.

"From the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis, it's been clear that testing is one of the most critical tools we have to slow the spread. The more you test, the more accurate a picture of the state's cases you have," Cuomo said. "This is a perfect example of how New

York's approach of partnering state institutions with the private sector is paying dividends and helping us fight the pandemic. I want to thank SUNY's talented team that produced this simple, quick and effective solution to conduct more testing, faster. We're glad to see it approved by the FDA and look forward to its use throughout New York and beyond."

Malatras said, "FDA approval of this game-changing COVID-19 test demonstrates the ingenuity of the State University of New York to solve pressing issues. With this approval the innovation developed by Upstate Medical and Quadrant Biosciences will be leveraged on a national scale. This quick, non-invasive testing protocol – which has already boosted SUNY's testing capacity to 120,000 tests per week – will now help communities across the country better pinpoint and contain COVID-19. It's further proof that New York state contin-

ues to lead the way in the fight against this vicious virus. I want to thank Gov. Cuomo for his unwavering support by fostering public-private partnerships and his continued investment in innovation on our SUNY campuses – both of which helped make this possible."

SUNY Upstate Medical University Interim President Dr. Mantosh Dewan said, "This is indeed a game-changer. We have seen the benefits of this testing here in New York state as we have used it to test significant numbers of individuals quickly and safely to keep our communities, and in the case of our current testing work, local school districts and college campuses safe."

Richard Uhlig, Quadrant Biosciences founder and CEO, said "We are thrilled that the FDA has issued the Clarifi COVID-19 Test EUA approval for use in the diagnosis of COVID-19. The coronavirus has had a devastating effect on health and welfare worldwide, so it is extremely gratifying for us to take the expertise we have gained working on RNA diagnostic tests for other health conditions, such as autism spectrum disorder and Parkinson's disease, and apply that expertise to the development

of this critically important test."

The FDA-authorized saliva test for individuals complements Upstate Medical's and Quadrant's innovative pool testing, which allows for about 10 to 25 people to be screened in one COVID-19 test. The test's approval by the FDA means it can be brought to scale across New York as well as used nationwide.

The approved tests can be conducted using saliva swabs rather than swabs inserted in a person's nose. Individuals administer the tests themselves, swabbing their mouths, and provide the saliva samples, which are currently processed at SUNY Upstate Medical Center's laboratory.

In August, the New York State Department of Health granted approval for the test to be used by SUNY Upstate for surveillance testing purposes in the SUNY student body. With this FDA authorization, the new, innovative test will be available for use throughout the state of New York and the U.S. by high-complexity clinical laboratories serving patients at physicians' offices, urgent care clinics and hospitals.

The saliva test has been successfully developed by SUNY Up-

state and Quadrant into a "pooled test" where multiple samples are combined into a single "pooled" sample, which is tested for COVID-19. If the entire pooled sample tests negative, this means that all 10 to 25 people whose individual samples are included in the pooled group are presumed at the time to be COVID-free. Prior to DOH and FDA approval, if a pooled sample tested positive, each individual had to be retested. Now, thanks to this innovation by SUNY Upstate and Quadrant, if the pooled sample tests positive, each individual saliva sample within the pool is quickly tested individually to pinpoint exact positive cases and can occur without the need to collect a new sample, thus providing the ability to rapidly screen more than 15,000 samples a day in a single lab to identify the infected individuals.

A press release said, "The combination of surveillance testing and follow-up individual diagnostic testing, all using saliva samples and pooled technology, is a cutting-edge innovation that has enabled SUNY Upstate and Quadrant to provide affordable, high-quantity testing across the entire SUNY system."

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IN THE NEWS

Memorial to conduct COVID-19 testing at City Market

Niagara Falls Memorial Medi-

cal Center will conduct diagnostic testing for COVID-19 from 1-4 p.m. Friday, Sept. 25, at the Niagara Falls City Market on East Market Street.

A Memorial Medical Center physician will provide prescriptions to authorize tests for Niagara Falls residents. There will be no charge for the testing, which is supported by community development block grant funding allocated by Mayor Robert Restaino and the City Council.

Testing will be conducted by collecting saliva samples that will be analyzed for presence of the novel coronavirus that causes COVID-19. Those wanting to be tested should not eat or drink anything, brush their teeth, smoke tobacco products or vape for 30 minutes prior to being tested.

People who test positive for COVID-19 will be notified by the medical center.

Niagara Falls Fire Department memorial service canceled

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the Niagara Falls Fire Department Mutual Aid Association is canceling the annual memorial service held to honor brothers and sisters who have passed away this past year.

Due to the restrictions for social gatherings, the city feels it is in the best interest of attendees to cancel the event for this year, and honor the members who have passed away in 2020 in the memorial service planned for October 2021.

"Ultimately, public safety is our greatest concern," Fire Chief Joseph Pedulla said. "We believe this is the right decision under these circumstances. We must all do our part to limit the spread of COVID-19."