

# **New Bedford to expand testing program for large workplaces, at-risk areas**

Mayor Jon Mitchell and Southcoast Health have announced that, together, they are expanding a program to reach more at-risk areas and essential workers with COVID-19 testing.

The program is based on a joint pilot effort undertaken earlier this month to test commercial fishing crews on the New Bedford waterfront using the Southcoast Mobile Health Van for on-site, targeted COVID-19 testing, officials said.

That round of testing was a trial run to prepare for expanded testing capability, as targeted testing for essential and high-risk employees will be key to continuing to plan for reopening of the local economy and adjusting social distancing in the workplace, while keeping those employees safe both at the workplace and at home.

The City and Southcoast Health are partnering with the Immigrants Assistance Center to provide additional services and resources as part of the program. Medical interpreters from Southcoast Health will be on site, and literature in multiple languages will be available at the mobile testing site. Southcoast Health has also developed educational videos in multiple languages for employers to screen for their employees.

“Compared to other urban areas in the Northeast, a large portion of Greater New Bedford’s residents work in factories and other industrial facilities,” said Mayor Jon Mitchell. “Targeted testing at these facilities, coupled with the City’s safe-workplace orders, will help to stem transmission of COVID-19. I am grateful for the productive partnership with Southcoast Health, the Immigrants Assistance Center, and other

services to protect the residents of our region.”

These plans align with Southcoast’s comprehensive efforts on COVID-19 education and testing across the not-for-profit community health system’s service area, officials said. A drive-up testing center opened in Dartmouth in April, and a walk-up testing site at Tobey Hospital opened in early May. In addition, Southcoast has provided testing for homeless populations in Fall River with plans to assist and support communities throughout the region. Southcoast is currently processing test results in house after the acquisition of two analyzers, reducing turnaround times.

“We are immensely proud of our entire region’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and we’re fortunate to partner with our local municipalities in serving the healthcare needs of our region,” Southcoast President & CEO Keith Hovan said. “Throughout this battle, we have worked closely with municipal leaders, including Mayor Mitchell, our legislative delegation and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to ensure all residents have the access they need to healthcare services.”

Last week, Mayor Mitchell and the Board of Health announced two emergency orders to keep employees safe at their place of work, and to outline reporting requirements of COVID-19 in the workplace. The orders include strong measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in industrial facilities including social distancing, stringent cleaning and disinfection, employee temperature checks, and accommodations for any employees to use sick time in compliance with federal and state laws.