CLEVELAND COUNTY
PUBLIC HEALTH CENTER

Media contact:
DeShay Oliver
Deputy Health Director/Public Information Officer
Cleveland County Public Health Center
Office: 980-484-5199
Deshay.oliver@clevelandcountync.gov

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Free Telemedicine Program Launched to Increase Access to COVID-19 Treatment

RALEIGH, NC – People who test positive for COVID-19, particularly those who are uninsured or don't have a primary care doctor, will have better access to treatments thanks to a time-limited telemedicine program launched by the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services in partnership with StarMed Healthcare. After a positive test, early treatment is key to avoiding severe illness and hospitalizations, and treatment may even reduce complications from post-COVID conditions, also called long COVID.

"More than 1 million people in North Carolina don't have health insurance, which has made accessing care for COVID-19, as with other diseases, very challenging," said NCDHHS Secretary Kody H. Kinsley. "This program provides a temporary bridge to care for many in rural and historically marginalized communities, but we still need long term investments to close the coverage gap."

Free telemedicine appointments to screen for COVID-19 treatment eligibility will be available, while funding allows, to North Carolinians who have tested positive for COVID-19 with an at-home test or other method. To set up an appointment visit https://starmed.care/nc or call 704-941-6000, seven days a week from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. If the telemedicine provider determines a patient is eligible for oral antiviral treatment, such as Paxlovid, they can send a prescription to the patient's chosen pharmacy or through a mail-order pharmacy.

"Authorized COVID-19 treatments like Paxlovid can prevent hospitalizations and save lives if started within five days of symptoms," said NCDHHS Assistant Secretary for Public Health and State Public Health Officer Dr. Susan Kansagra. "Everyone, especially people at high risk of getting very sick from COVID-19, should have a plan to contact a health care provider right away if they test positive. This telemedicine program offers another option for quick access to lifesaving treatments."

This telemedicine screening service is available regardless of insurance status and IDs are not required. If you have insurance, StarMed Healthcare will bill your health plan and NCDHHS will pay for any additional balance. If you do not have insurance, you will not be charged for your appointment. Oral antiviral pills are available at no-cost to the patient.

Telemedicine appointments through StarMed's registration form are available in English and Spanish and six additional languages will be made available by the end of the week. Consultations are available in more than 200 other languages through an on-demand interpretation service. American Sign Language interpretation is also available. The telemedicine program will last from mid-December until funding runs out, which is estimated to be about mid-March.

COVID-19 trends are again rising according to the [NCDHHS COVID dashboard](). Flu and RSV have already stretched hospital capacity this year. One way to help is to get vaccinated and boosted against COVID-19. Everyone 6 months of age and older should stay up to date with their COVID-19 vaccines and boosters. Find a vaccine location near you at [MySpot.nc.gov.]() Everyone 6 months or older should also get a flu vaccine annually. Visit [MySpot.nc.gov/flu]() to find locations and more information.

Both the flu and COVID-19 vaccines are available at the Cleveland County Health Department. The flu vaccine is available with no appointment necessary, while the COVID vaccine does require an appointment by calling 980-484-6019.

NCDHHS strongly encourages everyone to stay prepared by knowing what to do and where to go if you get sick with COVID-19.

- Keep at-home tests on hand and take one if you have [symptoms]() or if you have come in [close contact]() with someone with COVID-19, even if you are up to date on your vaccines. Get tested at least five days after you last had close contact. **Free at-home COVID-19 tests are available for pick up at the Cleveland County Health Department Monday – Friday from 1:00 pm – 4:00 pm. There is a limit of 6 tests per person per week.**
- If you test positive, stay away from others and follow the [CDC's isolation guidelines](). Seek medical care immediately if you have trouble breathing or experience other warning signs. COVID-19 treatments are available and can lower your risk of hospitalization or death. For more information, visit [MySpot.nc.gov/FindTreatment]() [(Spanish)]() or set up a telemedicine appointment [online]() or by calling 704-941-6000.

Through the pandemic, StarMed Healthcare operated 750 test sites across 29 North Carolina counties, administering more than 900,000 tests and more than 500,000 vaccines.

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