

NORTHEAST HEALTH DISTRICT

220 Research Drive • Athens, Georgia 30605 • 706-583-2870



Barrow • Clarke • Elbert • Greene • Jackson • Madison • Morgan • Oconee • Oglethorpe • Walton

MEDIA RELEASE

For Immediate Release
April 20, 2020

Contact: Sarah Peck
Phone number: 706-510-5438

Multi-Agency Partnership to Bring Mobile COVID-19 Testing to Athens-Clarke County's Vulnerable Populations



Dr. Suzanne Lester, Athens Free Clinic (left) and Whitney Howell, Nursing Director for the Northeast Health District (right).

Athens, GA – At the request of the Athens-Clarke County Unified Government (ACCGov) and with coordination from the Georgia Emergency Management Agency (GEMA), the Northeast Health District is partnering with the Athens Free Clinic, itself a product of the Augusta University/University of Georgia Medical Partnership, to provide mobile COVID-19 testing to Athens-Clarke County residents who lack access to healthcare.

Dr. Suzanne Lester, assistant professor at the AU/UGA Medical Partnership and practicing physician at Piedmont Athens Regional, has overseen a mobile clinic that provides primary care to medically underserved individuals since 2018. Later that year, the clinic received grant funding from the CVS Health Foundation through the National Association for Free and Charitable Clinics. The grant funds were used to purchase a custom-built van, which doubled the number of patients the mobile clinic could serve at one time.

NORTHEAST HEALTH DISTRICT

220 Research Drive • Athens, Georgia 30605 • 706-583-2870



Barrow • Clarke • Elbert • Greene • Jackson • Madison • Morgan • Oconee • Oglethorpe • Walton

The mobile clinic will be used to provide COVID-19 testing to individuals who may be unable to access testing due to homelessness, lack of transportation, or other barriers to care. This is the second mobile unit to be used for COVID-19 testing in the local area. The Northeast Health District is operating a separate mobile clinic that provides drive-through testing at various sites throughout its 10-county area. The Athens Free Clinic mobile unit will be used differently, going directly to individuals who otherwise wouldn't be able to get tested. Both provide testing free of charge.

“We have had a long-standing partnership with the Athens Free Clinic to provide mobile HIV testing,” noted Patrick Reilly, the HIV Testing, Prevention, and Linkage Program Coordinator for the Northeast Health District. “It made sense to adapt what we were already doing to provide COVID-19 testing as well.”

Dr. Lester will be assisted by faculty physicians and residents. Medical students will staff a hotline to respond to requests from individuals and local agencies. The hotline will be available in both English and Spanish.

“We are using a grassroots network as well as reaching out to the over 500 patients we currently serve to identify areas of high need,” explained Dr. Lester. “This is a true collaboration among many partners to serve the entirety of the community and ensure everyone has access to testing.”

The Northeast Health District will support this collaboration by providing test kits and personal protective equipment, processing specimens collected by the mobile clinic, notifying individuals who test positive for COVID-19, and performing any needed follow-up.

There are now several ways to get tested for COVID-19:

- If you have a primary care provider, you can call your doctor, who can either perform the test or refer you for testing.
- If you do not have a primary care provider:
 - You can call the Northeast Health District's hotline for testing: 706-340-0996. The hotline is answered 8:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, and from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on Saturdays.
 - If you do not have transportation or have other barriers to care, you can call the Athens Free Clinic mobile unit Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.: 706-308-4092.
 - You can call a local urgent care center or federally qualified health center.

“Since testing is a key part of the effort to help stop the spread of coronavirus, ACCGov has been working with state, regional, and local organizations to support ways to increase community testing capabilities,” says J.W. Thaxton, Interim Emergency Management Coordinator for ACCGov. “The mobile clinic project is a fantastic collaboration that helps expand overall testing and provides it to our most vulnerable populations and residents who had little or no access previously.”

NORTHEAST HEALTH DISTRICT

220 Research Drive • Athens, Georgia 30605 • 706-583-2870



Barrow • Clarke • Elbert • Greene • Jackson • Madison • Morgan • Oconee • Oglethorpe • Walton

For information about COVID-19, visit <https://dph.georgia.gov/novelcoronavirus> or <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>. For daily updated COVID-19 case counts, visit <https://dph.georgia.gov/covid-19-daily-status-report>.

For more information on the local response to COVID-19, visit PublicHealthAthens.com.



Dr. Suzanne Lester, Athens Free Clinic (left) and Whitney Howell, Nursing Director for the Northeast Health District (right).

###