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## Health department and Care Free Medical urge caution regarding COVID-19 antibody tests

**LANSING, Mich.** – With issues ranging from quality to interpretation, blood tests that look for antibodies to SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19) are not yet reliable or practical for the general public.

Such tests are performed to establish that someone has had and recovered from COVID-19, but lack of testing reliability and uncertainty regarding the immunity response make it likely that the tests will give a false impression of one's vulnerability to the novel coronavirus. Antibody tests are now becoming more widely available across the state.

"I understand how appealing antibody tests are to the general public," said Ingham County Health Officer Linda S. Vail. "It would be tremendous if we could all know for sure if we were at risk for or safe from COVID-19, but the truth is that we cannot definitively give people this information. There are still many challenges with these tests, and most communities that have begun antibody testing have encountered difficulties. There needs to be more research before we can truly interpret the results of these tests."

There are at least 90 different antibody tests on the market, most of which have not been thoroughly vetted by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and do not have data regarding their accuracy and reliability.

"We are hopeful that antibody testing will evolve into a reliable mechanism to stratify risk categories, but there are too many unreliable tests on the market presently," said Dr. Farhan Bhatti, CEO and Medical Director of Care Free Medical. "We call on any organization who is considering antibody testing to also publicly release the sensitivity and specificity data associated with their tests so that the public can have trust in the reliability of their results."

The cost of tests can vary but are about \$100, which may or may not be covered by health insurance. If people opt to get an antibody test, they are encouraged to continue practicing social distancing regardless of the result.

"Antibody testing cannot be used with certainty to make a clinical diagnosis or an assessment of immunity to the SARS-CoV-2 virus, at this time," said Dr. Adenike Shoyinka, Ingham County Medical Director. "It is unclear when the body produces antibodies and whether the presence of SARS-CoV-2 antibody is protective and if so, for how long. The public is urged to apply great caution when using antibody testing to make decisions about their health or future exposure risk."

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