

COVID-19 TESTING STUDY

INFORMATIONAL CONTEXT FOR UHC CUSTOMERS

BACKGROUND

COVID-19 has infected hundreds of thousands of Americans and affected all of us. While the SARS-CoV-2 virus was first identified six months ago, there are still a lot of unknowns with regard to the virus, including its actual rate of infection and severity across the U.S. Through UHG's research and development arm (UnitedHealth Group R&D), we are conducting a random, large-scale study of the U.S. population to better understand certain characteristics of the virus. The purpose of this research is to better understand the prevalence of COVID-19 cases (symptomatic and asymptomatic—not showing any symptoms) as well as the progression of the disease from early symptoms to infection and recovery in the community.

WHO IS BEING ASKED TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH?

We have randomly selected over 100,000 Americans—representing a cross-section of the US population—who will be invited to join the study, with a plan to enroll up to 10,000 participants. Within this group there will be numerous UHC members, including members from our commercial and Medicare Advantage lines of business.

WHAT DOES THE STUDY ENTAIL—WHAT ARE WE ASKING PEOPLE TO DO?

At the outset, we are calling potential participants to see if they would like to participate in the study. Those who agree will be asked questions regarding quarantine practices, number of people in their household, the overall impact of COVID-19 on participants' personal lives if applicable, and any symptoms they are experiencing. Callers will be separated into groups of those who elect to do a one-time COVID-19 test and those who would like to do weekly COVID-19 testing for ten consecutive weeks. These test kits will be mailed to participants homes and require a nasal swab and finger-prick blood collection, as well as the packaging to mail back the test kit (all at no cost, with easy-to-follow instructions included). Participants will have access to their test results via a secure online portal (LetsGetChecked.com, a contracted, third-party partner, is providing the tests and website). For each test they complete, participants receive a phone survey call from a call center advocate. In the event that test results come back as positive or inconclusive or a participant reports COVID-19 symptoms, the participant will be directed to their physician or another identified resource for further testing and/or treatment. Participants will also have access to a 24-hour nurse phoneline for after-hours needs.

WHAT WILL WE LEARN?

At a basic level, quantifying the impact of an outbreak—and subsequently implementing control and containment strategies to control it—requires a deeper understanding of the overall number of infected individuals, an understanding of transmission dynamics and identification of the full clinical severity spectrum¹. The three crucial elements of population surveillance and understanding of an outbreak are (i) collecting multiple types of data, (ii) combining and analyzing this data, and (iii) communicating the analysis to those in a position to drive policy. In a time such as this, the best data streams come from simple, straightforward approaches. Combining phone survey data with COVID-19 diagnostic test data—obtained from a random group of participants representing a cross-section of the U.S. population—will help us understand SAR-CoV-2 infection rates and other important epidemiological data (refining R_0 estimates, and the role of subclinical, asymptomatic and mild infections, and how each plays into the transmission of the virus will inform evidence-based decisions and a better understanding of concepts like viral shedding). We plan to share the results of this study with policy makers, including members of the U.S. government, and potentially publish them as appropriate.

WHO IS CONDUCTING THE STUDY?

This study is being conducted in partnership between UnitedHealth Group R&D and the Harvard School of Public Health. The Principle Investigator (P.I.) on this study is Marc Lipsitch, epidemiologist from Harvard. LetsGetChecked is a contracted third-party that is providing the test devices and lab analysis.

¹ Lipsitch, et al. (2020). Defining the epidemiology of COVID-19- Studies needed. NEJM, doi: 10.1056/NEJMp2002125