

JUST IN Erie County says data review reveals 66 new coronavirus deaths

Mobile vans to start Covid-19 testing in poor city neighborhoods

By Scott Scanlon Apr 28, 2020 Updated Nov 15, 2020 0

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Novel coronavirus testing will become more visible this week in some of the poorest neighborhoods in Buffalo.

The testing will roll out, literally, in two vans.

“If I get 15% of my people tested, I get a good feeling for what we’re dealing with around the whole area,” said Dr. Raul Vazquez, who secured the testing vehicles from two health insurers, UnitedHealthcare and Fidelis Care.

Nurses and other health providers spent Monday afternoon outside the Urban Family Practice on Jefferson Avenue conducting blood tests on Medicaid patients to see if they’ve already had the new coronavirus and now have antibodies.

Staff will return Tuesday to conduct nasal swab testing that will show if patients currently have the virus; those who test positive would need to isolate themselves for two weeks.

The work is part of a growing effort to make more testing available across the region for those who have symptoms or believe they previously might have had Covid-19, the disease the new coronavirus can cause.

Urban Family Practice and other mostly Medicaid providers in the region plan to park the mobile vans in various places across city ZIP codes where positive test results have been among the highest in the region. Churches, community centers and other health practices will serve as testing sites.

This will complement testing that became available late last week at the Leroy R. Coles Jr. Branch Library on East Delavan Avenue. The library sits in the 14215 ZIP code, which on Monday had the second-highest number of confirmed Covid-19 cases in Erie County, 232, one less than the number of cases in the Williamsville 14221 code.

“I think the numbers are going to continue to be bad as we expand our testing,” said the Rev. George Nicholas, convener of the African American Health Disparities Task Force and pastor at Lincoln Memorial United Methodist Church. “The real issue is not just Covid-19. All it has done is expose the severity of the health disparities in this region.”

Nicholas praised Vazquez for leading calls for more testing since March 11, when the World Health Organization declared Covid-19 a global pandemic.

Vazquez is president and CEO of G-Health Enterprises. He leads Urban Family Practice, which serves about 8,000 patients; founded the Greater Buffalo United Accountable Healthcare Network, or GBUAHN, which also includes Jericho Road Community Health Center; and helps lead the Greater Buffalo United Accountable Care Organization, or

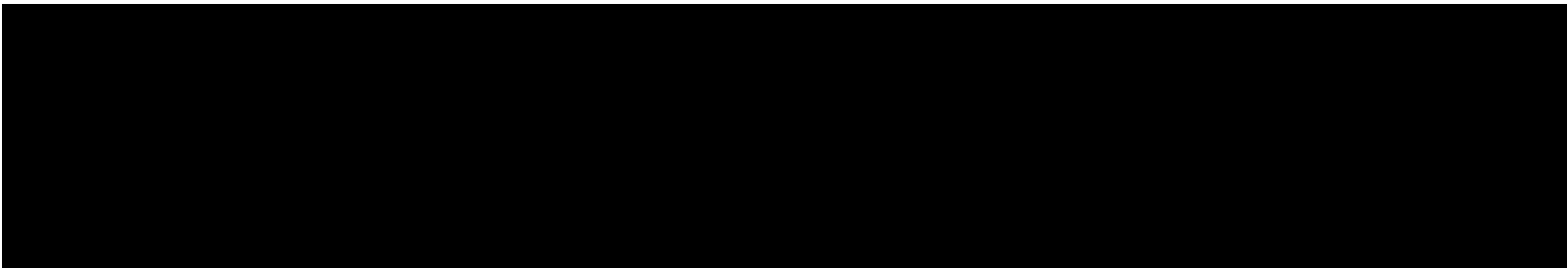
GBUACO.

GBAUCO-related health care practices, agencies and affiliated hospitals serve almost 30,000 mostly Medicare and Medicaid patients.

Those interested in testing need to call a nurse triage line at 604-0504 or download a Covid-19 survey on the Urban Family Practice, GBUACO or GBUAHN apps available to download free online or by phone at the app store.

Kaleida Health and Quest Diagnostics can each provide nasal testing for up to 150 patients a day. Antibody testing takes longer but also has become much more accessible, Vazquez said.

Urban Family Practice last week started testing people at a tent in its Niagara Street headquarters parking lot. That will continue from 9 to 11 a.m. weekdays.



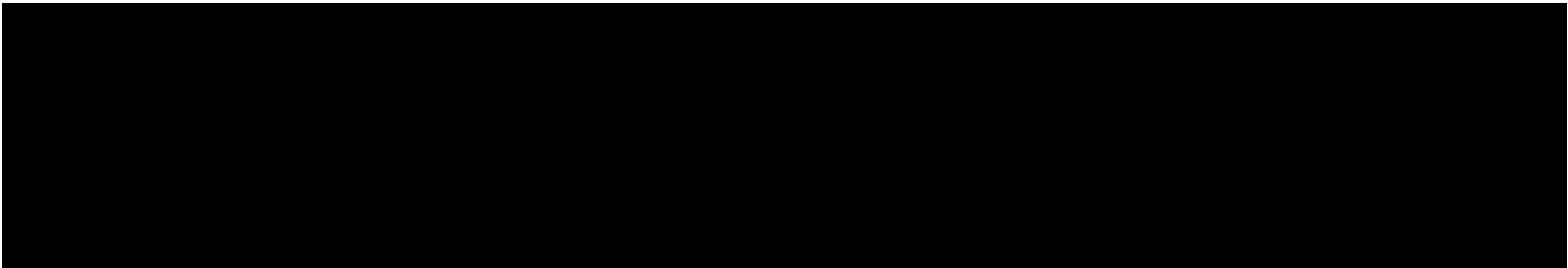
The practice conducted 141 antibody tests, received 50 results as of Monday and three patients tested with antibodies.

Covid-19 swab testing was conducted on 197 people, 118 results were received and nine were positive.

Vazquez said the work he and other doctors with large Medicaid practices have done to confront Covid-19 can serve as a model for all of medicine in the future.

The GBUAHN-related staff of 230 employees includes 94 patient navigators who check in regularly with patients to make sure they're eating right, exercising, keeping up with the vaccine recommendations and taking medications as prescribed. They also plug them into resources if they confront social determinants of health, including limited access to healthy foods, transportation or available services. They now work from home.

These navigators will be among staff who handle contact tracing when someone tests positive with Covid-19, helping assure they stay quarantined and that those they came in close contact with are tested and isolated.



Almost all patients now use telehealth for checkups. Transportation and cleaning employees have been repurposed to deliver goods from the practice's food pantry to patient's homes. Wellness employees have been teaching fitness classes online.

“It’s been an interesting model,” Vazquez said. “We haven’t had a single death from Covid.”

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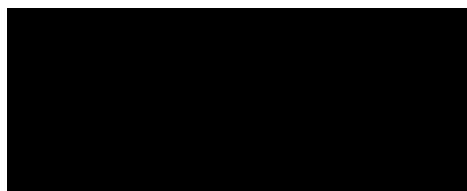
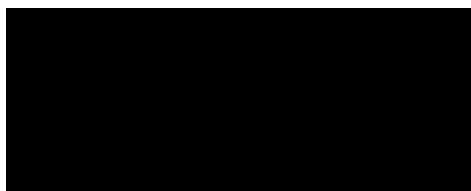
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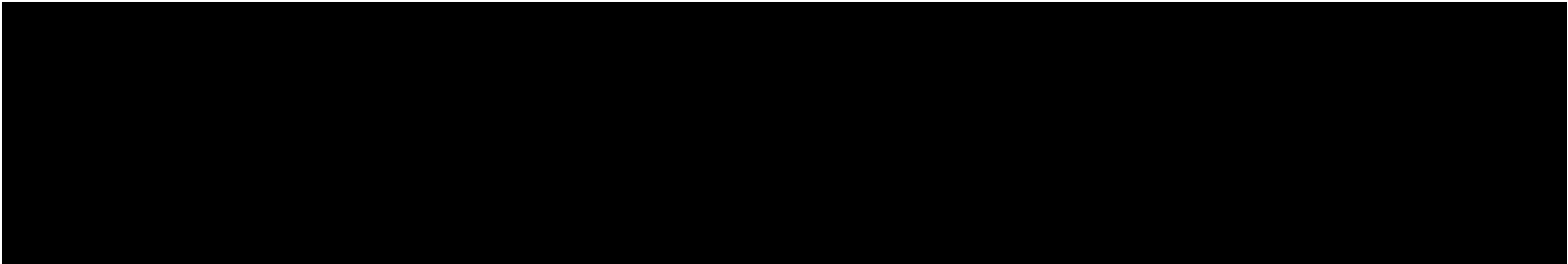
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