http://newiprogressive.com/images/stories/S5/covid-19-testing-troop-s5.jpg



Citizen Soldiers and Airmen are vital part in the state's effort to offer regular, widespread COVID-19 testing statewide.

MADISON — Gov. Tony Evers announced Thursday that the Wisconsin National Guard administered their one millionth COVID-19 test this week, representing a significant milestone in the state's effort to offer regular, widespread testing statewide.



"This milestone further exemplifies the absolutely vital role the Wisconsin National Guard has played in our state's response to the COVID-19 pandemic," said Gov. Evers. "This has been the longest activation of the Guard in state history and yet day in and day out the Guard answers the call to help their neighbors and communities. Whether through testing, working at the polls on election day, helping local governments, or assisting in our vaccine distribution program, we greatly appreciate their service and dedication to our state."

Citizen Soldiers and Airmen from the Wisconsin National Guard began establishing mobile COVID-19 testing sites in April 2020 at senior living facilities, correctional facilities, health

clinics, and businesses upon requests from local health officials. In May the Wisconsin Guard began working with local communities to establish regular and long-term community-based testing sites.

“We are pleased to see the Wisconsin National Guard reach this milestone of one million COVID-19 tests, and appreciate the work these Soldiers and Airmen do, ” said Wisconsin Department of Health Services Secretary-designee Andrea Palm. “Testing is one of the tools we use to slow the spread of this virus. And when we needed help increasing testing throughout our state, the Guard answered the call, and continues to be a valuable partner in helping ensure that anyone who needs a test can get one.”

Testing at Wisconsin National Guard supported sites represent only a portion of the testing available statewide. Over the course of the fall, testing at large-scale enduring testing sites in Milwaukee and Madison transitioned to civilian-run operations as the Guard’s efforts shifted to a regional-based testing model that offered more net testing on a regular basis to a larger number of communities in every region of the state.

“The detailed coordination between Wisconsin Department of Health Services, Wisconsin Emergency Management, and Wisconsin National Guard built the foundation for an effective testing program,” said Maj. Russell Simonis, the lead Wisconsin Army National Guardsman responsible for coordinating the Guard’s testing efforts. “This interagency effort has enabled counties and tribal nations across the state to meet their testing needs and help slow the spread of COVID-19.

“However, the Soldiers and Airmen who have worked on the frontlines of this challenging operation have been the true game changers,” he said. “They have voluntarily served for months on end, away from their families, to serve their state and communities in a time of dire need. Their actions embody the spirit of the Citizen-Soldier and we are exceptionally thankful for their outstanding efforts. This is why we serve.”

National Guard forces in other states have also assisted with COVID testing, however, in no other state has the Guard shouldered such a heavy share of their state’s testing efforts, and the Wisconsin National Guard is tops in the nation for number of tests administered.

Nearly 700 Citizen Soldiers and Airmen from the Wisconsin National Guard are currently serving in direct support of the state’s on-going response to COVID-19 in a variety of statuses. The past year represents a historic period in Wisconsin National Guard history, as thousands of Wisconsin’s Citizen Soldiers and Airmen have answered the call to support the state’s elections, preserve public safety during periods of civil unrest, and fulfill a variety of roles across the state during the COVID-19 pandemic, while hundreds of troops were simultaneously deployed to combat zones around the globe.