

UNIVERSITY OF HEALTH AND ALLIED SCIENCES

DIRECTORATE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

PRESS RELEASE

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Contact: Maria Gwira
Director of Public Affairs
mbgwira@UHAS.edu.gh

Government Designates UHAS Laboratory as COVID-19 Testing Facility

Background

In February 2020, University of Health and Allied Sciences took a leadership role in response to the COVID-19 pandemic by undertaking a series of actions that ensured that the University was adequately prepared as an institution for any occurrence. These actions also increased the visibility of UHAS as a leading institution in the field of Public Health. On 28 February 2020, the Vice Chancellor, Professor John Gyapong, in collaboration with the Acting CEO of Ho Teaching Hospital, Dr. John Tampuri, assembled a taskforce that drew up a preparedness and response strategy to address the pandemic in UHAS and HTH. The taskforce, chaired by Prof. Harry Tagbor, Dean of the School of Medicine, was assigned with sensitising the public in and around the University and establishing clinical and diagnostic protocols for potential cases in Ho Municipality.

Four working groups were formed from the taskforce to tackle (i) Clinical issues, led by Prof. Yaw A. Awuku, HoD Internal Medicine; (ii) Laboratory issues, led by Dr. Kwabena O. Duedu, HoD Biomedical Sciences; (iii) Educational campaign, led by Prof. Ernestina S. Donkor, Ag. Dean, SONAM and (iv) Advocacy and Publicity, led by Mrs. Maria B. Gwira, Director of Public Affairs.

Various strategies were developed by these working groups, and have since been implemented. The Advocacy and Publicity subgroup launched a Public Awareness Campaign dubbed, "Say No to Coronavirus in Ho: Know how to protect yourself." Two members of the Laboratory subgroup from the School of Basic and Biomedical Sciences and School of Allied Health Sciences received additional training from the Virology Department, Noguchi Memorial Institute of Medical Research on 3 March 2020 on the protocol and techniques used for diagnosing COVID-19 from clinical specimens. The Laboratory subgroup has since been putting in structures to enable testing to be conducted in UHAS for health facilities in and around Ho Municipality. In addition to the above efforts, UHAS, upon request from the Hohoe Regional Hospital, has made available the clinical trial facilities at its School of Public Health to be used to temporarily quarantine hospital staff who may have come in contact with the two COVID-19 positive patients being treated there.

Announcement

The Government of Ghana has recognised these efforts by tasking the University with testing suspected samples to diagnose COVID-19. During a surprise visit to Ho on Monday 30 March to assess the Regional Health Directorate of the Ghana Health Service (GHS) and the Ho Teaching Hospital (HTH) on their preparedness to isolate and treat potential COVID-19 patients in the area, the Minister of Health, Kwaku Agyeman-Manu, hinted that UHAS would be supported to do COVID-19 testing. The President of the Republic, Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo Addo, in his 7th Address on COVID-19 on Sunday 12 April, named UHAS as one of the institutions to do testing for COVID-19.

The University has agreed to play this crucial role, and will be responsible for processing samples from Ghana's Eastern Corridor, which comprises Volta and Oti Regions, as well as portions of Eastern Region bordering Volta Region.

Preparations by UHAS

The University has thus implemented the following steps as part of its readiness for this assignment:

1. The Vice Chancellor has set up a team of Biomedical Laboratory Scientists from across UHAS, led by Dr. Kwabena Duedu, to handle the testing in UHAS. The team, among other things, has been tasked to develop appropriate protocols for receiving, analysing, and reporting the results of samples. Appropriate training has also been conducted for members of the team for the assignment.
2. The team has conducted appropriate risk assessment and drawn up biosafety procedures in line with the World Health Organization (WHO) recommendations (WHO/WPE/GIH/2020.2) for the handling of samples in UHAS.
3. The team has also drawn up appropriate laboratory protocols for testing of the samples according to the WHO recommendations.
4. The WHO recommends that non-propagative diagnostic laboratory work (for example, sequencing, nucleic acid amplification test [NAAT]), should be conducted at a facility using procedures equivalent to Biosafety Level 2 (BSL-2). In line with this, the University has designated one of its laboratories as the sample-processing laboratory. As an enhanced safety measure, access to that lab will be tightly restricted.
5. The University has acquired an initial allotment of RNA extraction and RT-PCR kits, as well as Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs) for the work, and is also in the process of acquiring additional equipment to enhance capacity for testing.
6. All infectious waste will be autoclaved as required to render them non-infectious prior to appropriate disposal.

UHAS Management has assured the UHAS community that the University's team of scientists are all highly qualified, well-trained and experienced laboratory scientists who will observe all safety protocols to ensure that UHAS campuses remain safe for day-to-day activities.

To obtain extra information or clarification, please contact Dr. Kwabena Duedu at kduedu@uhas.edu.gh

You may also visit <https://www.uhas.edu.gh/en/public/coronavirus.html> for CoVID-19 resources.

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