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The Queens Medical Center and Assistance Dogs of Hawaii are Partnering in Major Canine COVID-19 Detection Study

Nov. 24, 2020 - Assistance Dogs of Hawaii (ADH), a Maui-based nonprofit organization and The Queens Medical Center, are participating in a major research study to teach dogs to detect people with the coronavirus and help prevent the spread of infection. The research will be conducted in partnership with Medical Detection Dogs UK, and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.

Phase 1 of the study is underway and includes collecting sweat samples, so dogs can learn to distinguish the scent of COVID-19. Hundreds of positive and negative samples are needed. Volunteers on Oahu are being recruited for the study, which poses no risk to human participants or the dogs, since the virus is not transmissible through sweat.

Volunteers must be:

- Age 18 or over
- Due to have a coronavirus swab test
- Willing and able to wear a face mask for 3 hours, t-shirt and socks for 12 hours

Those interested in participating can learn more at www.assistedogshawaii.org, or can call The Queens Medical Center at 691-8761.

Meet the Super Sniffers! Four Dogs from the ADH Campus on Maui are participating in the study. They include three Labrador Retrievers; Sadie, Tess and Yuki; and Samson, a Golden Retriever. Once trained, coronavirus detection dogs can be deployed in ports of entry and public gatherings, to provide rapid, non-invasive screening for COVID-19. This work may prove integral in the fight against Covid-19 and be a method of screening large numbers of individuals very quickly.

“The ultimate goal is the practical application of this research to help screen people, even those who may be asymptomatic, at places like airports, schools, hospitals and other gathering places to prevent the spread of disease,” said ADH Executive Director Maureen Maurer. “Man’s best friend is joining the fight against man’s worst enemy.”

It’s not the first time ADH has participated in a study on the extraordinary olfactory capacity of dogs to detect disease. Maurer, who has a Masters of Science in Canine Studies, was the principal investigator in two earlier research studies which proved dogs could detect life-threatening bacterial infections in humans with an accuracy rate close to 99 percent. “This is an opportunity for us to “paws” the spread of COVID-19,” quipped Dr. Whitney Limm, Executive Vice President and Chief Physician Executive of The Queen’s Health System.

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