Adirondack Health’s mobile COVID-19 testing clinic started to make its rounds Tuesday in Saranac Lake and Keene, and the organization says it has enough kits to give free swab and blood tests to anyone who wants one.

The mobile clinic, run out of an recreational vehicle initially repurposed to be a dental van, is performing nasopharyngeal (nose) swab tests, which are can show if someone has COVID-19 at the time, as well as blood antibody tests, which only indicate if a person has been infected with the novel coronavirus at some point, not if they have COVID-19, the disease the virus causes.

These tests do not cost people any money, whether they have insurance or not.

Adirondack Health Communications Director Matt Scollin said the Saranac Lake-based network has a “comfortable number of test kits” now, after some backlogged orders came through and Trudeau Institute of Saranac Lake provided 4,000 kits’ worth of the chemical liquid used in the tests. Scollin said that while swabs for the tests have been readily available, the liquid they are stored in had been in short supply. In late April, however, Trudeau Institute manufactured 2,000 kits worth of the liquid and delivered another 2,000 last week.
“Right now, we are testing anybody that wants a test,” Scollin said. “That’s people who are symptomatic, asymptomatic. That’s essential workers. That’s any other employment status, or unemployment status. That’s people that are insured. That’s people that are uninsured. That’s people that have doctors’ orders, and that’s people that do not have doctors’ orders.”

Scollin said Adirondack Health received so many pre-applications for its Keene clinic Tuesday that it moved the site from the Keene Health Center to Marcy Field, to accommodate all the traffic.

Adirondack Health ran a pilot version of the service last week, testing 99 people at Saranac Lake High School Tuesday, 160 at the North Elba Show Grounds Wednesday and around 100 at Tupper Lake’s L.P. Quinn Elementary School Thursday.

Scollin said calling ahead to 518-897-2462 before arriving for a test will give Adirondack Health time to collect necessary information in advance.

“We absolutely prefer appointments, and it will speed everything up and ensure we can process more people,” Scollin said. “We can give you a better defined time to arrive when mobile clinic is out there testing.”

Doctor’s orders are suggested but not required to receive a test.

At the mobile clinics, the hospital is now running two lines: one for people with appointments and one for those who arrive without appointments. Hospital staff members are prioritizing those with appointments.

“Appointments are increasingly being required because the interest is so strong,” Scollin said.

Scollin said Adirondack Health bills patients’ insurance companies when possible — New York state has barred insurance companies from charging people for getting tested for COVID-19 — but will always test uninsured patients and attempt to bill the federal Health Resources and Services Administration. It’s unclear at this point whether the hospital will ultimately get reimbursed for those tests. Scollin said billing HRSA brings in less money than billing private insurance companies.

Scollin added that there will be no out-of-pocket costs for people who get tested, because of state regulation prohibiting insurance companies from charging co-pays and deductibles for COVID-19 testing. Those without health insurance can apply for it during a special enrollment period through nystateofhealth.ny.gov through June 15.