

Phoenix PD crime lab becomes first crime lab in country to test for COVID-19

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The Phoenix Police Department's crime lab is now authorized to offer COVID-19 testing, the first crime lab in the country to do so.



PHOENIX (3TV/CBS 5) -- Medical experts have been saying for months that testing is the key to containing COVID-19.

The idea is that if someone knows they're infected they'll do a better job staying away from others. But what if someone passes away, and doctors aren't sure if they had the virus?

That's where the Phoenix Police Department's Crime Lab comes in.

Crime lab administrator, Jody Wolf said they've just become the first crime lab in the country to be certified to do COVID-19 testing. Right now, they are doing testing on people who died, and may have had the coronavirus.

"We don't always know when somebody passes away whether or not COVID-19 was involved," said Wolf. "By us being able to provide the capability to the state of Arizona, we help support capacity for living patients from a treatment perspective and answer questions of cause and manner of death in the medical examiner community."

On Monday, Phoenix Mayor Kate Gallego and Phoenix Police Chief Jeri Williams got an up close look at the crime lab and the COVID-19 testing process.

Back in March, when the pandemic started, Phoenix PD was looking for ways to help the community and determined that their DNA testing process was very similar to the testing process for COVID-19. Steps were taken to figure out how to test for COVID-19 in a crime lab.

Dr. Ross Goldberg is president of the Arizona Medical Association.

He said that being able to do contact tracing with people who have passed away will help in the ongoing effort, to get the virus under control.

"More testing is always going to be better because it's information," said Goldberg. "The more information we have, the more we can do contact trace patterns and better off we'll be able to figure out where the hot spots are. That works out for everyone, because that way, you can isolate those areas and not have to isolate everyone."