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Tennessee Guard reaches another milestone in COVID-19 testing

NASHVILLE, Tenn. – Since March, the Tennessee National Guard has been working diligently alongside Tennessee’s Department of Health, Tennessee Emergency Management Agency, and various other state and local agencies to successfully administer COVID-19 tests to fellow Tennesseans. By Oct. 8, Tennessee guardsmen have successfully tested over 400,000 of their fellow citizens.

“Our Soldiers and Airmen have been working around the clock since the pandemic began,” said Lt. Col. Keith Evans, the deputy commander for Tennessee National Guard’s Medical Detachment. “The number of citizens they have helped is a testament to their dedication to their neighbors and communities.”

Since April, Evans has been a part of Tennessee National Guard’s COVID-19 response as a medical provider and directing testing throughout the state. He is currently the acting commander for Task Force Medical and oversees the 21 Regional Assessment Sites throughout Tennessee where guardsmen are conducting the test.

At the start of the pandemic, guardsmen established temporary testing sites throughout the state to include vulnerable populations at long-term care facilities, county and state corrections facilities, public housing, and many other locations. They also established an Infectious Disease Team that visits hospitals and alternative care centers to help develop plans and processes that prevent the spread and decrease COVID-19 transmissions. Of the 400,000 Tennesseans guardsmen have tested, they administered over 57,000 to the most vulnerable populations.

Service members also set up drop-off sites and collected Personnel Protective Equipment donated to local hospitals, law enforcement agencies, fire departments, and other first responders, when these items were scarce. In coordination with TEMA, the Tennessee Guard is helping with warehouse operations for PPE where they helped distribute over 12 million units of PPE to those in need so far.

“Our guardsmen are professionals that are committed to helping beat this pandemic,” said Evans.

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Sgt. Robert Neal (left), an Infantryman assigned to 2nd Squadron, 278th Armored Cavalry Regiment, and Spc. Jason Bahr, a Combat Medic with the 208th Area Support Medical Company, perform COVID-19 testing at a Regional Assessment Site in Montgomery County, Sept. 28. Since late March, up to 2,000 Tennessee National Guardsmen have been activated in some capacity to provide support to the Tennessee Department of Health in their fight against COVID-19. (photo by Staff Sgt. Timothy Cordeiro)

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