

# Dept. of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection: Addressing misleading COVID-19 test advertisements

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The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) has reached a stipulated consent judgment in Dane County with Aleya Siyaj and Akbar Syed, doing business as Center for COVID Control, LLC, to address concerns with the company's misleading advertising related to COVID-19 testing.

During an approximately 14-month period from December 2, 2020 until January 21, 2022, the Center for COVID Control, LLC provided advertising, marketing, website optimization, a consumer call center, transportation, and other support services to Doctors Clinical Laboratory, Inc. This included establishing twenty-five collection sites in Wisconsin, six of which were in Dane County, where individuals could provide biological samples for COVID-19 testing.

With the intent of increasing utilization of the testing services available at the Wisconsin collection sites, Center for COVID Control, LLC advertised and promoted those testing services and collection sites to the public via website advertising enhanced with Google Search Engine Optimization, social media posts, and physical signage. The online advertisements stated that individuals who provided a biological sample for a free "gold standard" reverse transcription polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR) COVID-19 test would have their test results emailed to them within 48 hours. Contrary to these representations, individuals who utilized RT-PCR testing at their Wisconsin collection sites did not receive their test results within this time frame.

“Misleading advertisements are a common problem,” said Lara Sutherlin, Administrator of DATCP’s Division of Trade and Consumer Protection. “It’s unfair to consumers when businesses make promises they are unable to follow through on, but even more so when that business involves public health. It’s likely that many individuals who received tests from Center for COVID Control were attracted by its commitment to results within 48 hours. Dropping the ball on a service as vital as COVID-19 tests is unacceptable to consumers.”

The stipulated consent judgment states that Aleya Siyaj and Akbar Syed are jointly and individually responsible for paying civil forfeitures totaling \$11,250, as well as \$11,250 in statutory surcharges, statutory fees, and partial reimbursement of the DATCP’s investigative costs, for a total of \$22,500 made payable to the Dane County Clerk of Courts.

For more information and consumer protection resources or to file a complaint, visit DATCP’s Consumer Protection webpage at [ConsumerProtection.wi.gov](https://www.consumerprotection.wi.gov). If you have questions or believe you are victim to a scam, report it by contacting DATCP’s Consumer Protection Hotline by phone at (800) 422-7128 or email at [DATCPHotline@wi.gov](mailto:DATCPHotline@wi.gov).