

The Miller Report

Mendocino Coast COVID-19 Update for the Week of July 27, 2020

by
William Miller, MD, Adventist Health – Mendocino Coast Chief of Staff
Tabatha Miller, Fort Bragg City Manager

From William Miller, MD, our hospital's Chief of Staff:

New Health Officer Named for Mendocino County

Last week, the County Board of Supervisors appointed Andy Coren, MD, as the new Public Health Officer. Dr. Coren is Board Certified in Family and Community Medicine and has been in practice in Ukiah since 1988. He has served on the County's Public Health Advisory Board. His strengths include strong leadership skills, communication and team building.

I asked Dr. Coren about his plans for dealing with the outbreak at our local nursing home, Sherwood Oaks. He told me that he has been in touch with Dr. John Cottle, the Medical Director of Sherwood Oaks, and that their biggest challenge right now is finding adequate staffing. "They have lost several of their staff due to being out on leave from turning positive or from simply being afraid to come to work," he said. "We need to work with the State Health Department to give them the support they need to safely staff their facility."

Sherwood Oaks continues to take isolation measures designed to slow the spread of the virus. A total of 14 residents have tested positive, with nine becoming ill. Four have been hospitalized here at Adventist Health – Mendocino Coast, of whom one has made a full recovery and returned home to Sherwood Oaks. Three remain in our hospital and an additional four residents have died.

Dr. Coren and I also spoke about the need to expand community surveillance testing on the Coast. He agreed that the main challenge is that nationally there simply isn't adequate availability of tests and that the laboratories that run them are overwhelmed. "This is a problem not just here, but for the entire nation. It is frustrating that some lesser developed countries have done a better job at this with less technology than we have," he said. "And with some turn-around times stretching out to ten or more days, it doesn't even become an effective tool for contact tracing. The bottom line is that we cannot rely upon our technology to save us. It is the simple things that every person can do that will make the greatest difference. Of course, I am talking about the importance of wearing masks, washing hands and socially distancing ourselves."

"I am excited about the chance to start work on the Coast," Dr. Coren adds. "One of my first priorities will be to come out there and make a site visit to Sherwood Oaks, plus see your

hospital. I want to meet with community leaders and make sure that the Health Department is taking an active role in what is going on out there.”

Dr. Coren is replacing Dr. Naomi Doohan who has served as the interim Health Officer. She will stay on as a consultant to provide support for Dr. Coren as he takes on this very important role for our county. His expected start date is the end of August.

From Tabatha Miller, our Fort Bragg City Manager:

Mask Up Fort Bragg

At the same time I am writing this week’s Miller Report, I am drafting the Emergency Order reiterating the Mendocino County Health Officer’s Facial Covering Order and establishing higher penalties for violations. City Council directed me to issue the order during the July 27, 2020 meeting. Council’s direction follows similar action by the Mendocino County Board of Supervisors on July 8, 2020, Point Arena on July 14, 2020, Ukiah on July 15, 2020, and Willits on July 21, 2020. The County, Willits, Ukiah, Point Arena and Fort Bragg have all established penalties of \$100 to \$500 for failing to comply with the masking requirement. All individuals will be asked to put on the mask and will only be cited if they fail to comply or provide support for an exemption to the order.

I clearly remember the backlash the City (and I) received on social media in early April, when I brought forward the Administrative Penalties Urgency Ordinance to Council for possible approval. That ordinance would have allowed the City to issue administrative fines to individuals and businesses that violated the COVID-19 pandemic health orders. A slightly modified version of it was approved by City Council on May 11, 2020. However, that was before the hotels reopened and the tourists really returned. It also happened before we had 31 confirmed cases in Fort Bragg, 274 cases in the County, and before six persons died of the virus in Mendocino County (these are the numbers on 7-27-20).

Council has little or no influence over the availability of testing or control over contact tracing here in Fort Bragg, both tools to help stop the spread of COVID-19. But the City does have a little influence over two other tools: mask wearing and social distancing. What Fort Bragg, Willits, Ukiah and Mendocino County are trying to do is use those tools to fight the spread of COVID-19. Medical and health experts continue to stress the importance of facial coverings in decreasing the spread of the virus, and even reluctant politicians have recently revised their comments. Dr. Anthony Fauci, who dismissed masks early on because of the shortage facing medical workers, now advocates for facial coverings.

We, the public, have increased our acceptance of masking. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) who [surveyed 500 individuals](#), found in April that 61.9% left their homes wearing a facial covering. One month later, 76.4% left home wearing a mask. The graphics that show how far droplets spread when we are wearing facial coverings versus when we are not, illustrate the point that facial coverings are effective. According to a [recent research study](#), an uncovered mouth and nose will allow airborne droplets to travel approximately 96 inches or six feet. A bandana made of elastic T-shirt material will cut that distance in half to about 45 inches. A folded cotton handkerchief will get that down to about 15 inches and a stitched mask of quilted cotton reduces the distance to a few inches. When one coughs without a facial covering the droplets can travel up to 8 feet and when projecting, during singing or shouting, those can travel up to 12 feet.

One of the challenges in enforcing the Mendocino County Health Officer's Facial Covering Order, is that like the state order, there isn't a mandate that one wear a face covering at all times once you leave your residence. It requires individuals to wear a face covering before entering and at all times while inside an indoor facility or any enclosed space, and outdoors when unable to maintain a six-foot distance from other persons outside of their own household or non-distancing Stable Group. This makes it difficult to identify those who absolutely are violating the order, as unmasked individuals outside on the Coastal Trail or downtown could be with family or close friends. Additionally, the reference in the Facial Covering Order to putting on a mask when you pass within six feet of another is only a "recommendation." Many of the complaints that the County and local law enforcement agencies receive regarding violations of the Facial Covering Order are not violations – even though they may not be recommended practices. Be patient as we educate with the carrot and hope not to need the enforcement "stick."

Please join Dr. Miller and me for the rescheduled Miller Report Live on August 5, 2020, via Zoom at 5:30 pm. A Spanish language version will be held on August 6, 2020, at 5:30 pm.