



[For immediate release]
March 18, 2020

MENDOCINO COAST DISTRICT HOSPITAL

MCDH Update on COVID-19 Preparedness

From Dr. William Miller, Chief of Staff, Mendocino Coast District Hospital

My fellow residents here on beautiful Mendocino Coast, I am writing to update you on the work that we are doing at the hospital to respond to the national COVID-19 crisis.

First, let me assure you that as of this writing, on March 16th, there have been no cases of COVID-19 identified here in Mendocino County. Having said that, we do expect that we are likely to have confirmed cases in our community within the next few weeks as the virus spreads. Our attention is to being prepared for when that happens. We have access to the test and all of the suspected cases so far have turned out to be negative. There are some people in our community who are on *home quarantine*, however, that is a precaution and does not mean that they are known to be infected. The COVID-19 test is a send out that takes between 3-7 days to return an answer. We expect to be able to run the test in our own lab in about 6-8 weeks from now. Resources needed to perform the test are in limited supply, thus we are testing only those people who have symptoms and are more likely to have the infection. Testing of people who are well and without any known contact is not advised at this time.

We have activated our disaster plan, just like we did during the last electrical outage. We have implemented steps to minimize potential exposure of our patients and staff. We have implemented screening processes to quickly identify and isolate any persons who may be infected. One important step is to screen people who think they may be infected in their cars without coming into the facility. You can help us in this by calling ahead to your doctor or to the hospital if you think you might be infected. The most important symptoms to look for are fever, cough and shortness of breath. If you simply have a runny nose or sore throat or just feel achy, then that is unlikely to be COVID-19 and you should not be tested.

Protecting our nurses, doctors and other health care workers from exposure is crucial as they will be needed if this becomes more serious and widespread. One way to do this is to limit the traffic of visitors in and out of hospitals, nursing homes and other health care facilities. For that reason, Gavin Newsom, California Governor, declared that all visitors to hospitals will be restricted. Thank you for understanding this unfortunate need.

Both the CDC and the American College of Surgeons have published guidelines recommending that all non-essential surgeries and procedures, including screening colonoscopies, be postponed. The reason is that these use up surgical masks, gloves and other equipment that may become needed if the outbreak progresses.

A situation of this magnitude is affecting hospitals not only directly in terms of sick patients, but also in nationwide shortages of certain medical supplies and medications. This problem quickly starts to affect all hospitals, even if they don't have any COVID-19 patients. One of the challenges that hospitals are facing nationally is a shortage of personal protection equipment such as masks, and gowns. At this time, we have an adequate supply, however, that supply may become exhausted if there is a large surge of patients. Thus, we are taking steps to carefully use what we have so as not to waste this important resource.

One question that seems to be on a lot of people's minds is whether or not we have enough ventilators if there is a major outbreak here. I would answer that this is not what will be the limiting issue. It will be whether or not we have enough health care staff. We do have extra ventilators, but like most medical supplies there are national shortages as all hospitals across the nation ramp up.

Information and guidelines on COVID-19 are rapidly changing, sometimes within the span of a single day. We are maintaining direct contact with county and state health officials to ensure that we are following the most current recommendations and that we are doing everything we can to prepare.

We are also sharing information and coordinating efforts with the City of Ft. Bragg, the emergency medical services on the Coast, Sherwood Oaks Nursing Home and the Mendocino Coast Clinic. We are also in frequent contact with our partner hospitals here in Mendocino County; Howard Hospital in Willits and Ukiah Valley Medical Center.

We desire to keep our community as informed as possible as to what is going on and the steps we are taking in responding to this issue. To be honest, however, with things changing as quickly as they have and given the potential challenge that this epidemic may present, we have had to focus all of our efforts up until now on keeping pace with these changes and getting ready. Thus, we have not had time to put out more detailed information to you. We apologize for that, but please remember that the absence of such announcements does *not* mean that we are doing nothing or are unprepared.

Lastly, keep in mind that we do not know how this will affect our community. Corona viruses are a large family of viruses that we experience each year as seasonal colds. These viruses tend to follow the pattern of influenza. They start to move through our community each Fall and by April the number of cases start to decline and by June the flu season is over. It is possible that this corona virus, COVID-19, will behave similarly. If that is the case, then we may experience only a few cases here. We simply don't know yet. So, what we need to do is hope for the best, while preparing for the worst. I think it is time for us all to take a slow deep breath and stay focused on that reality while we make preparations for what to do if this does become a serious problem for us here on beautiful Mendocino Coast.