



# The Miller Report

## Mendocino Coast COVID-19 Update for the Week of March 30, 2020.

by

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

As other places in the US start to see exponential rise in the number of patients in their hospitals, we continue to work diligently here on the Coast to be prepared. Since we still have no *patients* with COVID-19 in our neck of the woods yet, this is giving us some important extra time to get ready and we are not wasting that time. However, to be sure, the virus is here now or will be soon enough.

Again, we appreciate you all sheltering in place to help reduce the spread of the virus. At a time like this, there is something else that we also need to avoid spreading and that is rumors. There have been a lot of rumors flying around the community about the hospital that are simply not true. This is not helpful and only adds to the state of general confusion and anxiety. Here are some of the more interesting ones that I have recently heard and can dispel.

Rumor 1, we have a physician who is infected with the virus. No, not true. To date, we have not had any staff that are known to be infected or suspected of being infected or who have a known exposure. We do have some traveling staff that may come from parts of the country where the prevalence is higher. In such cases, we follow CDC guidelines and if indicated, ask the traveler to self-isolate and/or to be tested, depending on the situation. If the epidemic hits our health care system as hard as it has hit other places, then we may see a surge of patients in our hospital to such a degree that we will be thankful indeed to all of the help we can get, especially from those outside travelers who help us staff our hospital.

Rumor 2, we have run out of masks. No, not true. As you all know by now, there is a national shortage of all personal protective equipment (PPE). New York City announced this morning that their supply will only last one more week. Thus, supplies are being diverted to those parts of the country that are in greatest need. As a result, we must be very careful to conserve what we have now. Over the last two weeks, we have been asking our staff to re-use the same mask. This is following the CDC

guidelines and is also what other hospitals are doing. Fortunately, we just received a small shipment of masks and will be loosening up those rationing requirements. When you consider that we currently still do not have any patients admitted here with COVID-19, it would be a serious mistake to use up our supply of protective equipment at a time when the risk is still very low and then not have enough when we do have patients with the illness, which we know will in fact eventually happen.

Rumor 3, we are missing out in participating in County, State and Federal assistance. Again, not true. All hospitals in the State are now coordinating on a daily basis with the California Dept. of Public Health and reporting on all aspects of our situation including numbers of cases, supplies including PPE, available beds and available ventilators. We are definitely in the line up to receive help if we have the need. The shipment of masks mentioned above came from this coordinated effort.

At this time, we have completed or will complete in the next few days the following. We have increased our ICU bed capacity from 4 to 12. We have ordered 8 more ventilators, to add to our current numbers and we also expect to receive at least 4 of the 20 or so that the County is seeking to obtain. We have expanded our regular med-surg capability by an additional 12 more beds. These bring our total hospital capacity up from 25 to 45. The State has asked us to increase our bed capacity by 30-40%, and as you can see we have far exceeded that at almost a 100% increase including tripling our ICU beds. We are working to obtain all of the extra supplies and medications that such a tripling of critical care beds will require.

The biggest challenge will be staffing. At this time, it looks like we may be able to double our hospitalist coverage at least during the peak of the surge. We are looking at how to potentially use some of our clinic providers to help out in hospital and ER settings. We are also exploring ways to get enough nurses and other staff, including respiratory therapists. Fortunately, we do have the luxury of having just a little bit of time before the storm to make such preparations. As I said before, we are not wasting that time for which we are truly thankful.

**From Tabatha Miller, our Fort Bragg City Manager:**

When the Mendocino Public Health Official issued the Revised Shelter-in-Place Order on March 24<sup>th</sup>, it had a termination date of April 7, 2020 but is now extended until further notice. This is consistent with Governor Newsom's Stay-in-Place Order. President Trump just extended his social distance guidelines through the end of April. Likewise, the Mendocino County Superintendent of Schools, Michelle Hutchins, extended the modified or "remote" learning for all schools in the County through May 1, 2020. The message is clear that we will continue to live much as we have over the last two weeks for another month – maybe longer. The good news is that as a community we are healthy and we have not yet experienced the COVID-19 surges that New York and other parts of the world have already and that we hope to avoid through our Shelter-in-Place actions.

Understanding the short-term future, I encourage everyone to take stock of where they are at financially and emotionally, not just physically. If you need financial assistance, the sooner you act, the better. Here are a few programs and suggestions that may help you through the next several months:

1. If you have been laid off or your hours reduced, apply for unemployment now. The stimulus bill approved by Congress and signed by the President last week adds an additional \$600 per week above the regular state benefits for up to 4 months.
2. Governor Newsom has negotiated a 90-day Mortgage Payment Relief program with many of the state and national mortgage providers. This applies to all Californians regardless of income level. Contact your mortgage provider immediately if you are unable to pay your mortgage in full now or in the near future. Even if your mortgage provider is not on the Governor's list, they are likely to work with you.
3. Contact your student loan provider and the Federal Department of Education to arrange for a temporary suspension of your monthly student loan payments.
4. If you rent, reach out to your Landlord as soon as possible, if you are unable to make your full rent payment when due. You have protection from eviction under the Governor's March 27<sup>th</sup> Executive Order, the City of Fort Bragg's March 30<sup>th</sup> Eviction Moratorium and/or Mendocino County's March 24<sup>th</sup> Eviction Moratorium.
5. In the City of Fort Bragg, your water and wastewater utilities will not be shut off for nonpayment in March or April. PG&E has made a similar promise to its customers.
6. If you need assistance with groceries, contact the Fort Bragg Food Bank (707) 964-9404. You can also apply for CalFresh benefits at [getcalfresh.org](http://getcalfresh.org).
7. General advice - the best thing you can do for your financial health is to be proactive and reach out to your creditors and discuss your options. This will often protect your credit for the future.

During this stressful time, taking care of your emotional health is also critical, especially if others rely on you. Reach out by phone, Zoom, FaceTime, email or Facebook to friends and relatives to keep connected. If you need more assistance remember your local resources:

- Redwood Community Services Crisis Line 1-855-838-0404 or the Crisis Text Line text TALK to 741741
- Project Sanctuary for Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Prevention and Support (707) 964-4357

As we focus on the physical health of our community and ourselves, remember to manage your financial and mental health as well. If you have questions, City Staff is available at (707) 961-2823 (Spanish speakers are also available). If you need nonemergency assistance from the Police Department, please call (707) 964-0200. In a true emergency, as always dial 911. Stay safe and healthy.