

The Miller Report

Mendocino Coast COVID-19 Update for the Week of April 6, 2020.

by

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

Efforts to slow the spread appear to be working here in Northern California and especially for us here on the Coast. Initial projections were that we would start seeing a surge of COVID patients in mid-April peaking in a potentially overwhelming volume by mid-May.

However, this has notably changed thanks to everyone's efforts to shelter-in-place, social distance and washing hands. Based on an epidemiologic model developed by Stanford University, we are now expecting a more modest rise to begin in June with a manageable peak sometime during the summer.

If this behaves like other corona viruses, then the summer months should also see a reduction in transmission, with a picking back up in the fall.

At our hospital, we have adopted a multi-phased plan which will allow us to bring into play resources at different times as the volume dictates. We continue to work closely with County and State officials as well as our sister hospitals in Ukiah and Willits.

Initially, following the direction of the CDC and State Health Department, we canceled all elective surgeries. This was primarily to conserve personal protective equipment such as gowns and masks. Now that we are expecting a longer time to when we may experience a peak in COVID cases locally, we are scheduling surgeries that - while not an emergency - are nonetheless essential or cannot be safely delayed for months on end.

If you have a surgical problem that has been postponed due to the COVID crisis, we recommend that you check with your primary care provider and surgeon to determine if your procedure can be further delayed or needs to be done sooner.

We continue to desire to offer testing more broadly to the general public, however, our supply of test sampling kits remains limited with no increase expected in the foreseeable future. Rest assured that we have enough kits to use for testing on sick patients, health care workers and if necessary at local long term care facilities. However, at this time, we are not able to expand testing to people who have only mild symptoms.

We have now completed majority of preparations that we can do at this time. Much of our focus now will be on continuing to procure needed supplies / equipment and to rehearse our practices.

From Tabatha Miller, our Fort Bragg City Manager:

Homelessness was a challenge for our City, County and State before the COVID-19 pandemic. Today, under this new pressure, it is even more challenging. The Mendocino County's Revised Shelter-in-Place Order of March 24, 2020 specifically addresses the homeless and strongly urges homeless to obtain shelter and for governmental and other entities to make shelter available as soon as possible. Even the County government has acknowledged this is easier said than done, despite additional resources.

To get homeless Californians safely into shelter and housing, Governor Newsom provided \$100 million to Continuums of Care (CoC), larger California cities and counties. CoCs are regional or local planning bodies that coordinate housing and services for homeless families and individuals, designed to promote communitywide commitment to the goal of ending homelessness. Locally, the Mendocino CoC was allocated \$152,982 and Mendocino County \$140,748. The Governor's efforts to protect renters from eviction and homeowners from foreclosure is an effort to keep people housed and not homeless during this crisis. Where the CoC's funding will be used is still being determined.

Balancing Social Distancing in a shelter situation is also difficult. Shelters are set up to house as many people as possible. In fact, earlier efforts including Shelter Crisis Declarations, recently required by local governments seeking other state funding, relaxed building and safety codes so that more homeless could be housed in less space. Now, shelters are strongly encouraged to reduce density to reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19.

The short term answer, endorsed by the Governor, is using hotels, motels and trailers, particularly for those at a higher risk and those who may need to be isolated or quarantined. This works as a short-term answer while our local hotels are closed to all but those performing essential activities, but it still leaves us with the same issue after the COVID-19 emergency is over.

Here in Fort Bragg, the Mendocino County Hospitality Center's (MCHC) Winter Shelter was extended by the County from its original closing date of March 15 to April 7. During that period of time, MCHC moved its most vulnerable clients from transitional housing, the Hospitality House and the Winter Shelter to local motel rooms for protection from the virus, under the County's Pandemic COVID motel voucher program. During this same period, the number of overnight guests at the Winter Shelter surged to record levels. In March, the Hospitality House was closed to outside guests to protect the health and safety of residents and staff. Meals prepared at the Senior Center will be delivered to those temporarily housed in motel rooms. Other groups, including the Fort Bragg Food Bank have stepped up to provide additional meals to the homeless.

The recent increase in the transient population is not unique to Fort Bragg. Ukiah and Willits have seen a similar influx of new homeless. This isn't even a new trend. In the last month, encampment in Ukiah has significantly increased in population. Individuals who are not local or from Mendocino County are not provided motel rooms because of the scarcity of resources. The Mendocino Transit Authority (MTA) cancelled service from Mendocino County to Sonoma County (Santa Rosa) as of April 1 and as of April 7, service to/from Fort Bragg to Willits and Ukiah on Route 65 was cancelled in an effort to keep people from nonessential travel between counties and between cities during this crisis.

Coastal Street Medicine is reaching out to the local homeless community with education, hygiene and screening related to COVID-19, including taking temperatures (over 100.4 is an indication of COVID-19). The Team consists of a nurse, nurse practitioner, scribe and case manager. Coastal Street Medicine is also supporting the MCHC by providing PPE, medical and hygiene supplies, and by establishing protocols for screening staff and clients. They have regular hours at the Hospitality Center at 101 N. Franklin every Wednesday from 9:30 to 11:30 a.m. Going forward they hope to provide weekly rounds at the local motels where homeless individuals are housed. They are working closely with Mendocino County Public health team implementing surveillance testing here on the Coast for the homeless population. This could identify positive test results within this group from asymptomatic individuals in order to identify and mitigate the risk early.

Although a rudimentary issue, when the City closed all of its public restrooms, we knew we needed to provide our homeless population with access to toilets and hand washing. Rented portable toilets (ADA compliant with hand washing station) are in place in the City Hall parking lot up against the north side and at Town Hall.

A heartfelt thanks all those working with our local homeless population.