

# The Miller Report

## **Mendocino Coast COVID-19 Update for the Week of May 25, 2020.**

by

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

### **Need for More COVID Testing on the Coast Called For**

A small outbreak of COVID-19 has occurred in Redwood Valley which is located in Mendocino County north of Ukiah along Highway 101. Nine new cases have now been traced to an event at a local church that involved singing on Mother's Day. Three of those are hospitalized currently at Adventist Health – Ukiah Valley Medical Center. Over 300 other people have tested negative as part of the contact tracing effort according to the Mendocino County Health Department's news release of May 24<sup>th</sup>. Contact tracing and testing continues.

This outbreak underscores the importance of several factors that increase the likelihood for spread of COVID-19: close proximity for a prolonged period (in other words, more than just passing by someone in a hallway), crowded indoor conditions and forced respiratory exhalation, such as coughing, sneezing and singing, which generates a lot of virus particles and carries very high risk. We have seen many church-related outbreaks around the US associated with singing.

Several scientific articles have come out which reinforce the above mentioned factors as being of high risk. It is also clear that it is very difficult to catch this through exposure in the out-of-doors. Also, transmission through contact with contaminated surfaces, such as door knobs, while still a concern accounts for a low number of cases. Since this is not a bloodborne pathogen, transmission from mosquitoes does not occur. So, social distancing (avoiding indoor crowds), face masks and handwashing remain your best protection.

From a population perspective, the key to controlling this epidemic is widespread testing and good contact tracing leading to quarantine of people infected. Unfortunately, such testing remains limited in many rural areas including here on the Northern California Coast. A testing center has opened in Ukiah, the OptumServe testing site is open to the public Tuesday – Saturday from 12:30 pm – 7:00 pm at the Redwood Empire Fairgrounds, 1055 N. State St., Ukiah CA 95482 in Carl Purdy Hall. Appointments can be made by calling 888-634-1123 or by visiting <https://lhi.care/covidtesting>.

Local leaders, including Mayor Will Lee, City Manager Tabatha Miller, Mendocino Coast Clinics (MCC) CEO Lucresha Renteria and myself are working to find a way to get such testing done here. MCC, in collaboration with the City of Fort Bragg, has done about 323 tests. MCDH has

done an additional 199 tests, all of which have been negative. However, we need to do more local surveillance testing. This will help guide decisions on when to start rolling back on shelter-in-place and how to best do so. The Miller Report will strive to keep you informed on such important progress.

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

### **Shelter-in-Place Stress**

I don't believe anyone would be surprised to know that there has been an increase in police calls associated with mental health since the Shelter-in-Place orders went into effect. Verbal and even physical disputes between spouses, roommates, and neighbors are on the rise. Likewise, individuals struggling with more significant mental health issues are more prevalent. This includes two individuals who jumped from the Noyo Bridge. Three men were stabbed in the Noyo Harbor and other violent crimes have happened elsewhere in the County.

These examples are the outliers or the extreme specimen of not dealing well with stress. Arguably some of these crimes or incidents would have occurred during normal times. However, most of us see an increasing tension in our communities and across the nation. There is no shortage of things for us to stress about - health, safety, money, job, loved ones, family, kids, state of the nation, the sick, the poor, our neighbors, the economy, the national debt, etc.

As City Manager, the stress and tension I find the hardest to manage are the confrontations happening on whether local and state governments should enforce the shelter in place orders, educate violators or take action against the orders. Not surprisingly, people feel strongly about each of these approaches and everywhere I looked over the weekend I saw conflict over this issue. I realize that by writing about it here and especially if this gets posted on Facebook, I will stir up emotions. This is a hot button.

For the record, the City will continue to abide by the Public Health Officer's Orders. My oath as a public employee requires that I respect, follow and encourage others to follow the law. When necessary, and where education has failed, the City and the Police Department will enforce the Orders.

Once a week, the City Managers meet by telephone with the County CEO, Carmel Angelo and the Public Health Officer, Dr. Doohan. These calls are short but helpful to understand some of the reasons why the Health Officer made certain decisions. In discussing the move to stage 2.5 of reopening, the conversation centered on trust and responsibility. Neither the County nor the cities can police the details of all the businesses or customers in their jurisdiction. In Fort Bragg, our Police Officers can hardly keep up with regular crime, emergencies and calls for help without trying to determine if someone's business is following all the protocols set forth at [mendocinocountybusiness.org](http://mendocinocountybusiness.org). This site provides businesses with the guidance to reopen and the means to self-certify that their business is complying. The site also lists every business that has successfully completed the self-certification process.

The process is about trust and it is about each of us taking responsibility for our own health and the health of others. Each of us gets to evaluate the risk of our behaviors and decide if going out to eat is worth it or not. If I enter a business that isn't following the social distancing protocols or practicing good hygiene, I can make a decision to stay or go.

The mask or face covering – I will be the first to admit I don't like wearing it. I don't wear it at home or in the car by myself. I do not wear it when I run or exercise, because I can't breathe. But I stay far away from others and have it with me, if needed. I wear it into stores, I wear it walking around town and when I cannot social distance. I don't wear it to protect myself but to protect those I might come in contact with. I don't have any reason to believe I am COVID-19 positive but I would hate to find out I was and had infected someone else.