



# The Miller Report

## **Mendocino Coast COVID-19 Update for the Week of June 15, 2020**

by

William Miller, MD, Mendocino Coast District Hospital Chief of Staff

Tabatha Miller, Fort Bragg City Manager

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

### **As Shelter-In-Place Relaxes**

Most of us are grateful that the Shelter-In-Place requirements are beginning to relax and, perhaps even more importantly, that the process of relaxing the requirements is being conducted in a thoughtful and step wise fashion. There is no question in my mind that it has protected us from an onslaught of cases that would have overwhelmed our health care system. There are those who scoff at this and demand to see the research that proves it worked. To them, I would say that the proof is that we are now well into June with still no COVID admissions at our hospital. A far cry from the original predictions made by epidemiologic models that by mid-May we would have as many as 80 patients in our small, 25 bed hospital.

Regardless of whether we agree on the need for such extreme public health measures, I think we can all agree that it did come at a significant financial cost. In particular, the lost revenue to our community from tourism. So, now that we are starting to relax the restrictions and tourism is starting to slowly pick back up, let's be careful. It would be a shame to have paid such a high price to now lose any gains by going to the other extreme and refusing to wear face coverings, refusing to practice social distancing and refusing to limit the size of gatherings. COVID-19 is real and it is going to creep into our coastal community, so now is not the time to throw caution to the wind. Please, be mindful and wear your mask.

On the other hand, we should not be excessively fearful of efforts to return to some degree of normalcy either. Yes, there will slowly be more cases of infection here as a result. That is unavoidable. However, if we continue to take basic common-sense steps such as wearing our masks, washing our hands and not crowding together, the rate of transmission will be kept at a low level. This is the world we now live in and we will likely be dealing with this for at least another year or two to come. Hopefully, it will eventually burn itself out, but if SARS-1 is a good example (COVID-19 is caused by SARS-2), then it will take about that long to die down.

In the meantime, there is increasing concern that folks with other health problems are avoiding getting healthcare out of fear that they will catch COVID if they go to the hospital or a doctor's office. A public poll conducted in May for the California Hospital Association reported that more than 40% of Californians are "not too willing" or "not at all willing" to seek care in a hospital emergency room due to fear about COVID-19. Additionally, 37% said they were reluctant to seek inpatient and outpatient hospital services for the same reason.

This is concerning because people with non-COVID health problems might experience unnecessary worsening of those conditions as a result. Our hospital, our ER and clinics (both North Coast Family Health Center and Mendocino Coast Clinics), carefully follow all the CDC guidelines to protect our patients and staff from transmission of COVID. Our lab and x-ray departments are fully open for services. We are working on re-opening our surgical services and this week resumed performing colonoscopies and injections for chronic pain.

Another important change that the relaxing of Shelter-In-Place mandates are allowing is for us to start allowing visitors to come see patients in the hospital again. This is such a crucially important step in the healing process. As with other steps towards normalcy, we will have to do this in a stepwise fashion starting with allowing just one visitor at a time and between the hours of 1:00 PM and 8:00 PM daily. Patients at end of life can have up to six family members as visitors.

Thank you all for your patience and support of our hospital, clinics and healthcare providers.

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

### **Public Meetings During COVID-19**

Back in May, when City staff started planning for the City's first public City Council meeting, none of us expected the meeting to be centered on one of the most controversial issues to face the City in recent years: Discussing whether to place an item on the ballot in November asking the City voters if they want to change the name of Fort Bragg. We considered closing the meeting to the public for health and safety reasons. However, because we know many members of the public want to participate in this decision, the City will conduct the meeting in person but with some additional options for participation from afar. The in-person meeting is scheduled for 6:00pm at Town Hall, 363 N. Main Street, Fort Bragg, California. Further, to ensure that there is ample time for public comment, this item will be the only conduct of business item on the June 22, 2020 regular City Council Agenda.

In order to conduct the in-person meeting in a safe manner and comply with the Mendocino County Health Officer's current Order, we will require social distancing, face coverings, limit the capacity in Town Hall to 25% of normal and have hand sanitizer available, which we encourage you to use. To provide for social distancing, the number of staff attending in person will be limited. Zoom will be available for staff and for Councilmembers who prefer to continue to Shelter-in-Place. For members of the public who would also like to Shelter-in-Place, meetings as always can be viewed on Comcast Channel 3 or live-streamed from the City's website. Members of the public may also watch the meeting after the fact - in reruns on Channel 3 or by accessing the archived meetings from the City's legislative platform via the City's website: [cityfortbragg.legistar.com](http://cityfortbragg.legistar.com).

If you are interested in providing public comment, for non-agenda items, consent calendar items or on the topic of a possible ballot measure to change the name of Fort Bragg, you have a number of ways to participate. Both remote and in-person options are available. First, you may submit your comments through the City's online eComment agenda feature. Second way is to submit written comments to the City Clerk, June Lemos, at 416 N. Franklin Street, Fort Bragg, CA 95437 or by email to [cityclerk@fortbragg.com](mailto:cityclerk@fortbragg.com). Third way to submit comments, is to use Zoom by accessing the link from the meeting agenda posted on the City's website

[cityfortbragg.com](http://cityfortbragg.com). Please note that if you choose to submit public comments using the Zoom option, you will not be able to watch the ongoing meeting from this link. Members of the public will remain in the waiting room until their turn to speak. Depending on your own computer settings, you will have the option for voice and/or video.

The final way to submit comments is the old fashion way – in person. If you choose to participate in person, please remember that occupancy in Town Hall is limited and seating will be first come, first served. You will be required to wear a face covering. If occupancy of the building is at social distancing limit, you may have to wait outside Town Hall. An audio speaker will broadcast the meeting into the courtyard south of Town Hall and public speakers will be asked to cycle through so that everyone has a chance to participate.

As we continue to reopen City government, we ask for your patience and understanding. These precautions are to ensure that everyone feels safe and to minimize any unnecessary risk in participating in the public process.