

The Miller Report

Mendocino Coast COVID-19 Update for the Week of July 20, 2020

by

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

Ethnic Disparity in Mendocino COVID Reflects National Trends

This week, Mendocino County broke 200 in the number of COVID positive test results since the pandemic began in March. Currently, there have been three COVID related deaths, two of whom were residents here in Sherwood Oaks nursing facility. Currently, there are nine hospitalized persons, four in Ukiah, three in Willits and two here. The majority of these 200 cases are doing well and are expected to have only mild to moderate symptoms and recover without any need for hospitalization.

The demographic breakdown of these 200 cases shows that 10%, or about 20 people, have been on the Coast, while two-thirds of the cases (144) are inland in the Ukiah Valley. A concerning statistic is that about 60% (122) are identified as Latinx/Hispanic. The Latinx population comprises 26% of the residents of Mendocino County according to the US Census estimate of 2019. We have seen similar disparities throughout the US in terms of Latinx and African-American populations making up a disproportionate number of COVID cases elsewhere. Additionally, the mortality rate in these populations may be higher if they get COVID because there is also a disproportionately higher rate of diabetes, obesity and heart disease. These three factors seem to be the highest risk factors for a poor outcome in COVID.

According to a NY Times article from May 7th, "Latinos may be more vulnerable to the virus as a result of the same factors that have put minorities at risk across the country. Many have low-paying service jobs that require them to work through the pandemic, interacting with the public. A large number also lack access to health care, which contributes to higher rates of diabetes and other conditions that can worsen infections."

I feel that we must avoid being judgmental of any group when it comes to health. Instead, we should recognize where these disparities exist and explore them to find out why they are happening to better support our fellow community members. In reality, the dynamics of how any large health issue affects a particular group of people is often very complex.

According to Lucresha Renteria, CEO of Mendocino Coast Clinics, "Many Hispanic people live in homes with multiple families, certainly multiple different generations. Much of the culture is based on large family interactions." She also went on to point out that many of these same

people work low income jobs where they get paid on a day to day basis. They simply cannot afford to take off 14 days to self-isolate. “It isn’t just that the person cannot afford the loss of two weeks of income, it is also that when they try to go back to that job, they are likely to find that it has been filled by someone else in the interim,” she said. “So taking time off from work could mean losing the job altogether.”

Lucresha and I are reaching out to the County Health Department to explore ways that our two organizations can work with health officials in developing more effective strategies to reach out to this population. Simply translating a flyer into Spanish isn’t likely to be enough.

From Tabatha Miller, our Fort Bragg City Manager:

PSPS in the Time of COVID-19

Over the last couple of weeks, we have watched as Pacific Gas & Electric (PG&E) moved large generators and other equipment onto and around the Fort Bragg substation on Walnut Street. The generators are expected to provide temporary power generation during a Public Safety Power Shutdown (PSPS). We have been told that the temporary power generation should be capable of powering the whole substation which extends from north of Westport to just north of Caspar here on the coast. There are caveats to full service that include the existence of a High Fire Threat that may reduce the area served and the available supply of temporary generation that could still leave us without power during a PSPS.

Over the last several months, PG&E has hosted a number of events for local government partners updating us on the additional preparations that the company has undertaken this last year to be better prepared for and possibly to prevent or shorten the length of PSPS events. These efforts include sectionalizing devices that allow PG&E to redirect power to avoid the large scale events we lived through last year. PG&E has increased the field crews, helicopters, airplanes and equipment used to inspect the lines prior to regenerating the transmission lines in order to restore power faster. They have also increased the tools for monitoring and predicting weather, updated their website capacity, and improved their customer alerts. Despite all this effort at improvement and temporary power generation, none of us should assume we do not need to plan for PSPS this fire season.

The point is, that as thankful as I am for the additional preparations and improvements by PG&E and the temporary power generation, that doesn’t eliminate the need for the City of Fort Bragg to prepare for the next PSPS event. It also doesn’t eliminate the need for each of us individually, as families or as businesses, to prepare. I certainly haven’t forgotten the five days last October that we lived without power. But times have changed. Our response last year was to open up the lobby of City Hall and the Police Department to allow folks to crowd in to charge devices. That won’t work the same way with social distancing. The same is true of the Community Resource Centers (CRCs) set up by PG&E to help communities. This will likely happen outside with social distancing and mandatory facial coverings.

I hate to nag during a pandemic but if you want a diversion from our current emergency, put together your plan for PSPS and consider the supplies you need to stockpile now. First, are you signed up for [alerts and notifications](#)? Do you have a [safety plan](#)? What is your plan for charging your phone and other devices if the power goes out? Do you have emergency lighting and backup batteries? Have you checked your batteries lately? Can you get in and out of your garage without power? Are you keeping your vehicle’s gas tank full? What about propane for

your home? Do you have sufficient medication, oxygen and nonperishable food? What is your plan to check on neighbors, friends and family in the event of a PSPS event during the COVID pandemic?

Here at the City we have focused on redundancy in internet connectivity, backup generators for our communication systems, updates to our obsolete radios and other communication systems and tools, and better communications with PG&E, Mendocino County and our residents. A few other things to remember: If you get your water/sewer bill from the City of Fort Bragg, these services will continue even in a power outage; Waste Management will also continue with basic solid waste pickup; when the battery power for the traffic lights goes off, treat traffic lights like four-way stops; and keep your refrigerator and freezer closed as much as possible. The City will post updates on the City of Fort Bragg Facebook page, the Police Department Facebook page, our website, in print in the windows at Town Hall, City Hall and the kiosks, and through regular communication to our local radio stations.