

March 13, 2020

ISSUED BY: Northeast Tri County Health District,
Newport Hospital and Health Services

CATEGORY: News Release

RELEASE DATE: For Immediate Release

REGARDING: COVID-19 VIRUS

The novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) has expanded rapidly since first being detected in Washington State on January 21st. While initial cases of the new virus were found in western Washington, cases have now been detected in several eastside counties.

To date, there have been a total of 549 presumptive positive cases detected with 29 mortalities, mostly occurring in a long-term care center located in Kirkland. Northeast Tri County Health District has monitored and tested returning travelers and there have been no positive test results for the virus within the area. "While there has yet to be a detected occurrence in Pend Oreille County, we do expect to see cases and we are working with community partners to prepare" said Matt Schanz, Administrator for the Health District. He also stated that as testing capacity expands, it is likely we will see more positive test results occurring throughout the state.

According to the District's Health Officer Dr. Sam Artzis the best strategy is to "implement interventions that will slow the progression of spread and protect our vulnerable community members. While most of us will experience mild symptoms, those individuals over 60 years of age or those with underlying health conditions are at the highest risk for complications."

Symptoms include fever, cough, and shortness of breath. Dr. Artzis states that "even those experiencing mild symptoms of respiratory illness should stay home when they are sick. Doing so protects someone else who could develop more severe symptoms." However, if symptoms progress and individuals need medical attention, it's best to call the medical facility ahead of arriving at their front door. This allows health care professionals a chance to develop a plan prior to arrival preventing unnecessary exposure of other clients and the health care workers.

Medical facilities and providers are taking action. Newport Hospital and Health Services (NHHS) is currently taking interim infection prevention measures against COVID-19. Administration and medical staff are staying abreast of COVID-19 developments and working closely with state, regional and local stakeholders.

Stevens County - 240 E. Dominion, Colville, WA 99114

Administration Phone: 509-684-2262, Fax: 509-684-1002

Community Health Phone: 509-684-2262, Fax: 509-684-9878

Environmental Health Phone: 509-684-2262, Fax: 509-684-8506

Ferry County - 147 N. Clark, PO Box 584, Republic, WA 99166

Phone: 509-775-3111, Fax: 509-775-2858

Pend Oreille County - 605 Highway 20, Newport, WA 99156

Phone: 509-447-3131, Fax: 509-447-5644

“As the largest health care provider in the county, our main goal is to protect our patients and our staff. We know that some of these precautions may seem over-cautious, but we are taking this seriously,” said Christina Wagar, NHHS Director of Operations. “We are asking the public to call their provider first if they are experiencing symptoms and to only use the emergency room for symptoms requiring immediate attention.”

At this time, NHHS staff members are collecting samples from patients who have provider orders for influenza, RSV, and COVID-19 tests. Providers send the orders to the laboratory, and patients are met outside in a protected drive-through area to collect their samples.

Until further notice, the only public access into the hospital building will be through the front main entrance. When asked, every person (patients, visitors, vendors, meeting members, etc.) entering the hospital building will be screened for any risk factors for COVID-19. In addition, every individual entering Newport Health Center (primary care clinic) must check in with the front desk and answer screening questions. Clinic visitors may also be asked to have their temperatures taken prior to being allowed entrance.

The safety of high-risk residents and their caregivers is of paramount concern for the hospital district. Visitation restrictions are now in place (until further notice) at River Mountain Village Advanced Care and River Mountain Village Assisted Living. Letters have been sent to residents’ family members notifying them of this change. Visit NewportHospitalAndHealth.org for updated mitigation practices.

Important steps that individuals and communities can take:

- Most important and effective--stay home when you are sick.
- Wash your hands frequently for 20 seconds and keep your hands away from your mouth, nose and eyes.
- Cough into your sleeve or tissue and dispose of the tissue into a waste basket.
- Make an emergency plan of action with household members. Have alternate arrangements for childcare in case schools or daycares close. Maintain your prescriptions so you have a supply on hand. Have emergency supplies on hand in case of community disruptions.
- None of us are immune from this. It’s what we do to help one another that makes the difference by practicing empathy and compassion.
- Make plans to check in with family and neighbors who live alone.
- Avoid large gatherings and events.
- Increase your personal space to 6 feet in social settings.
- Stay informed with credible information at <http://www.netchd.org> or www.doh.wa.gov. The Health District also has a Facebook page you can find updates.
- Consider canceling community gatherings and events depended on the outbreak situation.