

National, state and local agencies coordinate response

TD patient tests negative for COVID-19 virus

By Mark Gibson
The Dalles Chronicle

On March 1, a patient arrived at MCMC Emergency Department with coronavirus-like symptoms, but has since been tested and the results were negative, according to a press release from Mid-Columbia Medical Center.

Mid-Columbia Medical Center leadership has been meeting weekly to prepare for possible COVID-19 patients presenting at the hospital, said Stephanie Bowen in a press release. "Our nurses and physicians have been kept up to date on screening and identification, as well as safety protocols."

When the patient arrived exhibiting symptoms, "out of an abundance of caution, the patient was promptly placed in an isolation unit at MCMC and the suspected case was reported to North Central Public Health and the Oregon Health Authority," she said.

MCMC staff members who came in contact with the patient were asked to self-quarantine under the guidance of our local public health department.

On March 2, the patient's lab results from the Oregon State Lab confirmed that the patient tested negative for the coronavirus.

The patient and family have been informed of this, as has the staff with whom the patient came in contact. "We will continue working closely with NCPHD and the OHA, and following all recommended screening guidelines," said Bowen. "We have a dedicated team of healthcare professionals who are trained to handle patients with infectious diseases, and we have a plan in place to respond quickly to any eventuality. Our number one priority remains the safety of our patients and our community."

Oregon will be awarded \$500,000 by the Centers for Disease Control to support response efforts to the virus, Rep. Greg Walden announced March 4.

"I applaud the CDC for selecting Oregon to receive initial funding to help support our response to the coronavirus outbreak," said Walden. "This will help fund needs such as monitoring travelers, supplying medical equipment, staffing and infection control."

As of March 4, there were no cases of the COVID-19 virus within the jurisdiction of the North Central Public Health District, which covers Wasco, Sherman and Gilliam counties, district director Teri Thalhofer told the Wasco County Commissioners Wednesday morning.

The health district initiated an emergency management command structure Feb. 27 to address the developing situation in the region, and it is working with Oregon Health Authority to address concerns and are in contact with emergency managers throughout the district, Thalhofer said. Through the emergency managers, the district is encouraging first responders to be fit-tested for masks used to stop airborne contaminants. "Testing or mass use for the general public is not recommended at this time," she said.

Thalhofer said everyone is encouraged to go to the OHA website, where updated information on the virus and recommendations can be found. Links to OHA and the national Center for Disease Control can be found on the district website, ncphd.org. She noted that posted information is changing very rapidly. "We discourage people from printing out these documents and using them as references. We suggest they go to the website, which is refreshed when new information is added."

Automatic email updates are available on the OHA and CDC websites as well.

"If we have a case of COVID-19 within the jurisdiction, we will share that information with the public as soon as possible," Thalhofer said. "OHA and other jurisdictions have been notifying the public within hours of receiving a positive test result."

As of Wednesday evening, March 4, the OHA reported three confirmed cases in the state, 45 negatives and 13 tests pending. 115 Oregonians are being monitored, and 238 have either completed monitoring or were determined not to be at risk.

Thalhofer told the commissioners that should an outbreak occur, and they had specific questions, they should contact her by email—but warned that response might be slow, as the district's capacity is limited and they will be prioritizing responses.

Asked about the value of masks for the general public, Thalhofer said such masks can stop the disease from

spreading, but will not necessarily protect the individual from contracting the virus unless they are specially fitted to the individual.

There is no reason to panic, she added. There are

a limited number of cases in the United States, and the majority of people who do contract the virus have a mild reaction, she explained.

According to a report by Oregon Capital Bureau, The

state of Oregon has prepared for a rapid increase in testing for COVID-19 should federal authorities, rattled by a rocky start, expand the criteria of who should be tested.

Last week, the Oregon

Health Authority received 1,500 kits to test for the novel coronavirus, replacing kits that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention discovered produced erroneous results.

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