



Tech Sgt. Aaron Perkins/Oregon National Guard

Tents are going up at Providence Seaside Hospital in preparation for a coronavirus outbreak.

Hospitals: 'We're really geared up for the positive test, if it ever happens'

Continued from Page A1

surgeries, would be communicated directly by caregivers or providers. The hospital has 25 beds but has plans to expand to handle additional patients if necessary.

"We are facing uncertain times in health care," the hospital said. "Things are changing so rapidly that in some circumstances, yesterday's decisions are being amended today."

Mike Antrim, a spokesman for Providence Seaside, said the 25-bed hospital is adding an additional 16 beds. Camp Rilea personnel with the Oregon Military Department also worked with state and Providence Seaside maintenance crews in putting up tents outside the hospital.

The tents will be used for testing and triaging people who get sick from COVID-19.

Elective surgeries are medically necessary but can be delayed, according to David Northfield, a spokesman for the Oregon Association of Hospitals and Health Systems. Examples are knee or hip replacements, cataracts or a deviated septum.

Testing is difficult

The message this week from local public health officials on testing for the coronavirus was dire: Act like everyone around you could have the virus, but don't expect a test for it soon unless you're suffering from pneumonia-like symptoms.

"The health care community is just as frustrated with the inability to test as the public is," said Ellen Heinitz, a naturopathic physician and Clatsop County's community health project manager. "We would love to do that in a heartbeat if we could. It's just the roadblocks to that are not something we have control over."

State labs and the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention are limited in how many sample kits they can give out or process, Heinitz said.

To be considered for a test, a person needs to be in need of hospitalization and show symptoms of a lower respiratory infection, severe shortness of breath and other pneumonia-like symptoms. They also have to first test negative for the flu, which was already in season prior to the spread of the coronavirus, along with a host of other illnesses.

Heinitz and other health officials have preached the basics: Wash hands with hot soap and water for at least 20 seconds; keep a distance from other people; regularly clean and disinfect surfaces; get a flu vaccine; and stay home if sick.

"If they have something mild, stay at home, quarantine yourself for 14 days or until you have no symptoms for three days — whichever is longer," Heinitz said.

Scott Docherty, a local photographer and web designer, was among the few tested by a local health care provider.

Docherty said he immediately quarantined himself in his house after falling ill around a week-and-a-half ago. He went into his medical provider Tuesday with coughing fits, a stuffy nose

and a high fever, fearing pneumonia. The provider confirmed he didn't have pneumonia before testing him for COVID-19, he said.

"They weren't sure they were going to test me," he said. "Their criteria is pretty strict for testing people right now."

He and his wife, Mary, were told to quarantine themselves for at least another two weeks, he said, although he doesn't expect his test results for coronavirus back until Monday.

The Oregon Health Authority reported that 2,550 people had been tested for coronavirus in Oregon as of Friday morning, with 114 positive. Clatsop County hasn't recorded a positive case, but officials said they don't know how many people have been tested locally.

"The negative tests are great news," said Michael McNickle, the county's public health director. "That just shows the number of tests we're taking are all negative. That's actually good news. We're really geared up for the positive test, if it ever happens."

Some states have set up drive-thru testing sites. The county has a plan in place to set one up, but it wouldn't be very useful without enough testing kits or the capacity to process them, McNickle said.

Providence Health & Services announced that tests for COVID-19 would be processed in their regional lab. The lab will process tests collected in eight Providence hospitals in Oregon, including Providence Seaside.

Limits on hospitals

The limits on visits to hospitals follow state restrictions on Oregon long-term care facilities intended to protect the elderly and the disabled, who are at greater risk from the virus.

Only essential medical and emergency personnel and visitors to residents who are at the end of life are allowed at nursing homes, assisting living facilities, residential care facilities, adult foster homes and group homes for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Oregon is erecting a 250-bed temporary hospital at the state fairgrounds in Salem to free up other hospital beds around the state for coronavirus patients.

The Oregon Medical Station is a mobile emergency hospital that the state purchased several years ago in case of a health crisis.

The state's overriding goal is to slow the progression of COVID-19, so as not to overwhelm Oregon's health care system. Brown and other state officials said that is why restaurants, bars, schools and all large events have been closed or canceled.

"All the things we've been trying to do, as grievously hard as they are for the economy, are single-mindedly aimed at the notion of making sure we don't run out of hospital capacity," Pat Allen, the director of the Oregon Health Authority, told the state Legislature's Joint Special Committee on Coronavirus Response on Wednesday.

"This is a situation that will not last for weeks. This will last for months and potentially a lot of months,"

Allen said.

Along with setting up the temporary hospital in Salem, officials want hospitals to create 1,000 temporary beds statewide. Officials also are exploring whether hotel, college dorm rooms or other places could be used.

"Are there facilities we can literally stand up in parking lots?" Allen said.

These would be so-called "step down" facilities, requiring fewer traditional medical staff. Allen said they could serve patients who normally would be released from hospitals into nursing homes and other care facilities, which now have been closed to the public; less-sick patients who otherwise would be sent to regular hospitals; and homeless people and others who no longer require hospitalization but cannot continue their recovery at home.

Retired health professionals and others with medical training could be tapped to help staff these facilities.

"The idea is to basically within the next three to four weeks stand up as much of that kind of collection of care as we possibly can," Allen said.

Dick Hughes of the Oregon Capital Bureau contributed to this report.

State closes campgrounds starting in April over virus

By KATIE FRANKOWICZ
The Astorian

Popular campgrounds in Clatsop County will close in April to help reduce the spread of the coronavirus.

State agencies announced a temporary closure of campgrounds at state parks, forests and wildlife areas from April 3 through May 8. The state suspended all drop-in camping beginning Thursday, but reservations will continue to be accommodated through April 2.

The closure will affect the large campgrounds and yurt and cabin rentals at Fort Stevens State Park and Nehalem Bay State Park.

State campgrounds are

built into relatively small areas by design, according to information from the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department.

"Maintaining social distance is difficult," the department noted. "Working with fewer staff and volunteers is becoming a reality, making it difficult to maintain proper cleaning procedures. To support the state goal of reducing transmission of COVID-19, temporary campground closures are necessary."

The closures will not affect plans people may have to camp at Nehalem Bay over Oregon's spring break, but park managers have already fielded cancellations as concern about the coronavirus grows.

Ben Cox, park manager of the Nehalem Bay Management Unit, had started to ramp up to meet the expected demand at the campground.

"The phenomenon formerly known as the shoulder season is no longer a thing," he said. "We get pretty busy starting in March."

He had brought on seasonal staff earlier than has been typical and had moved shifts around to accommodate the expected influx.

But between the cancellations that have already happened and the state's decision not to allow any drop-in camping, Cox expects Nehalem Bay will look a little emptier than usual.

Port: Docking could be controversial

Continued from Page A1

The record cruise ship season expected to help offset those losses has so far been halted by the coronavirus. Major cruise lines announced a voluntary suspension of operations through early April amid the outbreak.

Astoria, Clatsop County and the Port jointly announced that no passenger-carrying cruise ships would be allowed to dock until after June 1.

Canada has disallowed all cruise ship tourism until July. Most cruise ships are registered to foreign governments, so they need to stop in a foreign country before visiting multiple U.S. ports. Bruce Conner, the Port's cruise ship marketer, cast doubt on any ships stopping in Astoria as long as Canada is off limits.

As of last weekend, there were around 40 cruise ships operating out of U.S. ports still at sea, according to the Cruise Lines International Association. About a quarter

were expected to come into port by Monday, with the rest soon ending their voyages.

"Given that there isn't enough space in some ports for all of the ships, we're docking them at other ports during our voluntary pause in operations," Carnival Cruise Line spokesman Vance Guliksen told travel website The Points Guy. "We're using a combination of ports in the U.S. and (The) Bahamas as well as anchoring some ships at sea."

Some residents on the North Coast have called for the cruise ship season in Astoria to be canceled entirely as a precaution against the coronavirus. The prospect of cruise ships temporarily docking at the Port, even with skeleton crews, could be controversial.

"The health and welfare of the city is going to supersede any business opportunity," Isom said.

The Port has reached out to the city, county, Columbia Memorial Hospital and Coast Guard on what it would take

to make the business venture tenable.

Astoria Mayor Bruce Jones laid out his criteria for allowing the cruise ships to dock: no passengers, no coronavirus concerns and no crew allowed off the ship. Ships would have to agree to make their medical teams, kitchen staff and rooms available if asked by the county, he said.

"If all these conditions were met, then the Port, county and city would decide how to proceed," Jones said.

Dirk Rohne, the president of the Port Commission, said that while the optics of a cruise ship in town might make people nervous, the risk would be low, and revenue is critical for the Port. The ships could also be an emergency asset with their medical teams and extra space, he said.

"We're not going to do anything to compromise the public's trust," Rohne said. "Ultimately, working with the city and county, public health is the first and foremost concern."

Caring for our community

Providence Seaside Hospital is committed to protecting your health and safety. To help reduce the impact of the COVID-19 coronavirus outbreak, here are some of the plans we've launched to care for our communities:

- We are following federal, state and local guidelines for personal protective equipment, visitor regulations and safe patient admission, and the transport and treatment of patients who have contracted the virus.
- We are committed to protecting our patients' privacy and will not acknowledge when we are treating people with COVID-19.

If you think you may have been exposed to the virus, we urge you to call your health care provider or connect to a health care expert through a respected app.

Providence Express Care Virtual provides affordable visits with nurse practitioners who can screen, assess, prescribe, and provide recommendations and follow up, all via smartphone, computer or tablet.

Most people who contract this strain of coronavirus will only experience mild symptoms. However, people who are elderly or are chronically ill, or who have compromised immune systems or other health issues **should seek medical help if they meet the criteria for COVID-19 exposure.**

As a community, we must all take precautions to lessen the spread of the virus.

It is extremely important for you to:

- Wash your hands thoroughly and often
- Cover your coughs and sneezes, using the crook of your arm and not your hands
- Avoid touching your face, especially your eyes, nose and mouth
- Avoid crowds
- Avoid shaking hands

Here are resources for up-to-the-minute information about the COVID-19 coronavirus:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov)
- Oregon Health Authority: healthoregon.org/coronavirus or call 211
- Providence: [Providence.org/oregon](https://www.providence.org/oregon)
- Express Care: [Virtual.Providence.org](https://www.providence.org/express-care)

[Providence.org/northcoast](https://www.providence.org/northcoast)

