

**VIRUS from page 1A**

facility, including Peace Harbor, but we're closely monitoring the situation in all our communities in partnership with the CDC and local public health agencies," Peace Harbor CAO Jason Hawkins said.

"There's no reason to panic at all," Western Lane Ambulance District and Siuslaw Valley Fire and Rescue Chief Michael Schick said. "We need to be cautious and ready, but I think everything we do for influenza, we should be doing for coronavirus. It is a bad disease. You see a lot of death, a lot more than what we see with influenza. But if you take the same precautions, people should be okay."

Coronaviruses are common throughout the world, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and includes multiple strains that "usually cause mild to moderate upper-respiratory tract illnesses, like the common cold," the CDC reported. "Most people get infected with one or more of these viruses at some point in their lives."

The recent coronavirus strain has been dubbed "COVID-19," a combination of "coronavirus disease" and the year it was discovered, 2019.

Generally, the virus spreads from person-to-person, though the CDC has not ruled out other means of infection.

"Currently, it's unclear how easily or sustainably this virus is spreading between people," the center reported.

After exposure to the virus, a person can begin showing symptoms as soon as two days, but as late as 14, according to the CDC. Symptoms mirror that of influenza, and can include fever, cough and shortness of breath.

While there is currently no vaccine for the illness, the vast majority of patients who contract the virus are able to recover, though there has been some concern that seniors have had more difficulty with the COVID-19 than other populations.

"Just like with the influenza virus, seniors are at a higher risk of serious illness," said William Foster, Peace Harbor's emergency department medical director. "Although there isn't yet a vaccine for the novel coronavirus, we encourage the same additional precautions that we would

with flu: Practice good hand hygiene and stay home if you're feeling sick. We would also urge residents to keep informed through reputable sources, such as the CDC, about the latest precautions related to travel."

Foster also stressed that Oregon has not had any instances of COVID-19 thus far.

As far as preparing for a possible outbreak, PeaceHealth Peace Harbor stated that the medical center is prepared to meet the needs of the community should the spread of COVID-19 escalate.

"Our local infection prevention experts are working with Lane County Public Health to establish clinical and operational protocols, implement isolation procedures, safeguard screening tools and lab testing and ensure adequate supplies and protective equipment," Hawkins said.

Peace Harbor is asking any patients who feel they may be at risk or are experiencing symptoms to call the hospital at 541-997-8412 before visiting the hospital so they can create a care plan that ensures the safety of all patients and caregivers.

"And we want to remind everyone about the importance of hand hygiene," Hawkins said. "Wash your hands frequently and cover your mouth and nose with your elbow when you cough or sneeze."

Other precautions, as issued by the state of Oregon, include:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick. Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces people often touch.
- Consult travel advisories if you plan to travel outside of the U.S.
- Take care of your health overall. Staying current on your vaccinations, including the flu vaccine, eating well and exercising all help your body stay resilient.

"Public awareness is key to preventing the spread of coronavirus," stated Brown's press release. "Just as with flu season, containing coronavirus starts with everyone — at home, in the workplace, and at school."

First responders with WLAD and SVFR are also preparing for a possible outbreak. As of right now, the agencies are taking precautions similar to that of the

recent outbreak of influenza. This includes limiting potential exposure to first responders with protective gear such as masks, gloves and goggles.

"I don't think we need to be worried yet," Schick reiterated.

**"We want to remind everyone about the importance of hand hygiene. Wash your hands frequently and cover your mouth and nose with your elbow when you cough or sneeze."**

— Jason Hawkins, PeaceHealth Peace Harbor CAO

If COVID-19 does come to the Siuslaw region, the chief said that it wouldn't prevent emergency responders from providing care. "If we start seeing patients around the state, then we would start dealing with notifying our personnel beforehand that this person might be infected with the coronavirus," he said.

As for local schools, Siuslaw School district is already in discussions on a response in the event that COVID-19 comes to the Siuslaw region.

"While the lethality of this virus is low, its infectious rate is quite high, and this is likely to cause some potential disruptions do daily life in the US if and when the virus starts large scale infections," said Siuslaw School Board President Guy Rosinbaum.

If COVID-19 comes to the region, he stated the likely outcomes to the district are twofold: Large-scale absenteeism due to illness and the potential for using district facilities for care centers.

In district policy regarding school closures, if seven to eight percent of the student population becomes infected, the schools will continue as normal. If 10 percent of the student population is infected, then additional custodial staff will be brought in to sanitize

the building at night. If 15 percent of the student body is infected, the district will contact Lane County Health for a potential closure between one and three days.

However, if 20 percent or

more of the population comes down with COVID-19, then the district will be closed, typically for longer than three days. Reopening of the school sites would be directed by Lane County.

As for the possibility of such a widespread outbreak, Siuslaw Superintendent Andy Grzeskowiak said, "The schools do have medical-grade sanitizers on hand, but this virus appears to have a longer viability on surfaces. And with the longer latency and transmission windows of this virus, the mandated closures to allow for site preparation and avoid re-infections would be a bit longer."

If the virus spreads significantly throughout the region, the Siuslaw Middle School gym will most likely be designated as an emergency medical refuge and triage site for the local area, depending on the severity of the outbreak.

"All of our school resources would go into supporting the community at need first," Grzeskowiak said. "All stocks of food, water and fuel will go to emergency medical relief in the event of a large-scale event. Our school buses are designated for emergency transport in the event of a community emergency — either from the hospital to tri-

age sites or from Florence to other medical service areas. In the event that school staff are not able to drive emergency transport, there is an agreement in place for first responders to use the bus fleet as necessary."

When cleared by either county or state health authorities, the schools would then reopen on a limited scale, "depending upon the use of school sites for critical care use and the ability to operate safely with the typical systems restored to basic level of service," Grzeskowiak added.

As for the state, Brown convened a Coronavirus Response Team on Friday, tasked with coordinating state and local agencies, as well as health authorities, in preparation for response to COVID-19. The purpose of the team is to "ensure we are taking every precaution necessary, in coordination with local health authorities, hospitals, community health partners and school districts, to make sure that Oregon is fully prepared to respond to any outbreaks of the coronavirus and that Oregonians know how they can keep their families safe," Brown said.

The state reported that agencies are reviewing readiness plans to ensure the government is able to maintain a continuity of operations and services in the event that coronavirus impacts agency operations.

State, county and tribal health officials are also monitoring people for symptoms

who may have come into contact with the disease or traveled to mainland China.

"Starting this week, Oregon Health Authority (OHA) is providing weekly public updates about how many people are being monitored in Oregon, as well as sharing updates about how Oregon families can help prevent the spread of coronavirus on OHA's COVID-19 website," the state said. "Oregon hospitals and health providers have scaled up their preparedness efforts, and OHA is conducting ongoing outreach to health facilities to support training and preparedness, as well as monitoring health care availability and needs."

Finally, OHA Director Pat Allen said Oregon is resilient in the face of such outbreaks, from H1N1 influenza to other global public health threats.

"Each time, Oregon's public health and health care systems and their partners have found ways to strengthen our collective response," he said. "If the coronavirus comes to Oregon, we will be ready."

For more information on the state response to COVID-19, visit [www.oregon.gov/oha/PH/DISEASESCONDITIONS/DISEASESAZ/Pages/emerging-respiratory-infections.aspx](http://www.oregon.gov/oha/PH/DISEASESCONDITIONS/DISEASESAZ/Pages/emerging-respiratory-infections.aspx).

For information from the CDC, visit [www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html).

For information for PeaceHealth, visit [www.peacehealth.org/medical-topics/ids/ack8845](http://www.peacehealth.org/medical-topics/ids/ack8845).

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