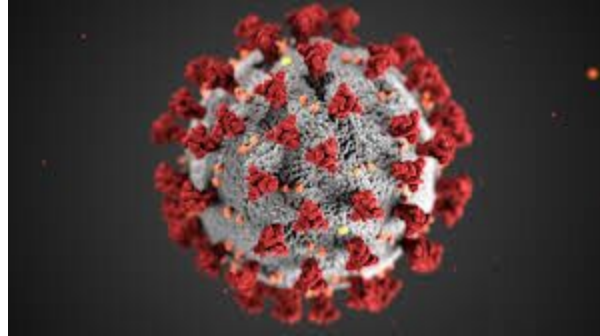


County receives new COVID guidance as Halloween nears

October 20, 2020



After weathering a flurry of new COVID-19 cases in Del Norte County, the public health officer shared some good news last week regarding new guidelines and testing for the coronavirus.

Dr. Warren Rehwaldt told county supervisors at their Oct. 13 meeting he didn't think the 21 new confirmed COVID-19 cases would be disastrous to Del Norte's status tier status on the state's Blueprint for Safer Economy.

Del Norte County currently sits on the second least restrictive Tier 3 and would have to experience at least 14 new cases for two consecutive weeks to be moved to a more restrictive tier, Rehwaldt said.

The county's COVID tracking site experienced technical difficulties, but as of Oct. 16, it indicated no new confirmed cases and just five active cases.

"I'm not too alarmed by it. We just need to be watchful moving forward, especially the next couple of months," Rehwaldt said. "Every little thing we can do to slow the transmission will make a difference in the end."

A new arrow in the county's quiver to strike at the coronavirus is the BiNaxNOW antigen test approved by the federal government. Rehwaldt said the test has been shipping to states and, working through the its partnership with the United Indian Health Service and Humboldt County, could be making a debut at nursing homes on a trial basis in the next few weeks.

"The nice thing about this test is it doesn't require any electronic device to accompany it. It's the equivalent of a home pregnancy test — put swab in after collecting sample then wait for color change," Rehwaldt said. "But it is less precise and a little prone to false results. But we're pleased it's coming our way."

He added county residents will still be able to get free Verily testing Mondays and Tuesdays at Del Norte High School and Wednesdays at Redwood Hotel and Casino in Klamath through the end of the month and probably through the end of their contract, which expires at the end of November.

In other news Rehwaldt was happy to share, Del Norte County received new guidance on gatherings from California Department of Public Health (CDPH). He said the new guidance allows for three households to gather together in one setting, while still asking participants to use face masks, good hygiene and other good common sense suggestions.

“It’s a good step in the right direction,” Rehwaldt said. “It doesn’t address a lot of issues in our part of the state — inclement weather much of the year — but will help people with some planning, especially with holidays coming up.”

Rehwaldt did speak of holidays, specifically Halloween, late last week in a letter to the community.

He said the CDPH does not recommend trick or treating, as its still considered extremely risky for people to mingle during the pandemic.

However, like the CDC, the state does not forbid anything. He added while some counties have released guidance or local health orders restricting this kind of activity on Halloween, Del Norte has not.

“We prefer to recommend that people consider the risk to them and plan accordingly,” Rehwaldt wrote. “There are a number of elderly persons or other high risk persons who should not be answering the door for trick or treaters.

“Likewise, there are families that have high risk persons in their homes, who should not be taking children from door to door this Halloween season. The risk of trick or treating is simply too high for both those groups,” Rehwaldt added.

However, realizing residents are going to trick or treat anyway, Rehwaldt recommended the following guidelines:

- Package candies five days in advance into small gift or snack bags.
- Keep the candy bags in a box outside the front door, keeping a safe distance from trick or treaters.
- Trick or treat at homes or places that follow these guidelines, such as the CHP’s “Trunk or Treat.”
- Wear COVID masks (costume masks do not protect you from others) and avoid crowding together with families.
- Have hand sanitizer with you as you and use it frequently while trick or treating and wash hands well after returning home.
- Place any candy not pre-packaged on a shelf for a few days so any virus on the candies themselves will dissipate.

Rehwaldt said for the adult activities, he'd prefer if everyone avoided costume parties, even with the state's new three household guidance.

"We think it is a very bad idea as the risk for creating new cases of COVID in our community is high, especially because of the number of Halloween parties that typically happen on this particular day, all at the same time," he said. "The reward may not be worth the risk to the community, as one night of partying may create weeks of distress."

For CDC guidance and their views on Halloween, go to <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/holidays/halloween.html>.

For the state's guidance on Halloween and Dia de las Muertos, go to <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/Guidance-for-Safer-Halloween-and-Dia-de-los-Muertos-Celebrations-during-COVID-19.aspx>.