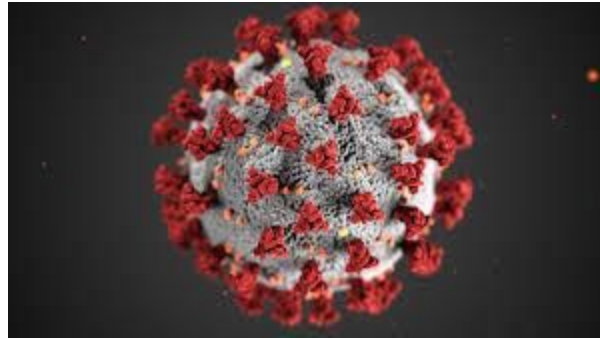


Memorial Day weekend sees another spike in coronavirus cases

May 26, 2020



Del Norte County registered another spike of 14 new confirmed COVID-19 coronavirus cases over the Memorial Day weekend, bringing the total to 40 as of Tuesday morning.

County Public Health Officer Dr. Warren Rehwaldt told the County Supervisors at their regular meeting today that what they're witnessing is the county's first wave of the pandemic finally striking here.

"What we're seeing is are interconnected cases – a couple at the prison, a few in agriculture, a couple hospital staff. That's to be expected," Rehwaldt said. "Sooner or later, every part community is going to get touched. This is a first wave for Del Norte County."

"My final, take-home message is this is going to go on for a while," Rehwaldt said. "A first wave is hitting us for the first time. That makes a difference and gets everyone's attention."

According to the Del Norte Public Health website, out of 933 coronavirus tests administered, there have been 40 confirmed cases, 841 negative results, 52 results pending and seven recoveries.

Kymmie Scott, County Office of Emergency Services Manager, said the new cases were diagnosed through aggressive efforts by the county's Public Health Department's Contact Tracing Team.

"The tracing team found most if not all the new additions were from contact with previous cases," Scott said.

Scott also confirmed there are now two positive cases from Pelican Bay State Prison staff. There are still zero confirmed cases among the prisoner population, Scott added.

Scott said even though there have been zero hospitalizations due to the coronavirus locally, it's no reason to take the virus lightly.

“A large reason for no hospitalizations is most patients were caught early through contact tracing, a lot before they were symptomatic. Some have since become symptomatic,” Scott said. “As case count goes up, the chance for hospitalizations will go up, too.”

“We wish people would heed public warnings. The virus hasn’t gone away,” Scott added. “As we reopen more businesses, it’s important we continue to follow social distancing protocols – wash your hands, wear a mask and keep six feet apart.”

Scott is worried too many people, locally and from outside the region, are ignoring social distancing protocols. The health department put out a reminder last Friday to local hotel and vacation homeowners to not violate stay at home orders and open their doors to travelers too soon.

“We had quite a few folks in town over the weekend,” Scott said. “Public health did connect with hotel owners, to remind them of lodging rules, that they should be open to essential business travelers only. There have been some violations of that over the weekend. We really want to focus on compliance and education than law enforcement.”

Scott said the news over the weekend hasn’t been all bad. The state has confirmed Del Norte County will get its own testing facility and churches have been given the green light to restart services with limitations similar to restaurants.

Scott said the coronavirus testing company Verily will offer a mobile, drive through site. You register online and get a serology blood test to confirm if you’ve been exposed to the virus. They’ll be open three days a week and be able to perform up to 480 tests a week. Scott said Verily is scheduled to start operations next week, but the county has sought fast track approval to get them here earlier this week.

“As soon as we get confirmation, we’ll post it on our social media,” Scott said.

The California Department of Public Health announced Monday the statewide reopening of places of worship for religious services, with limitations. Churches must receive approval from county public health departments. Once given approval, they must limit services to 25% of the building’s capacity or 100 attendees, whichever is lower.

With the arrival of good weather, Scott stressed now is not the time for everyone to let their guard down against the coronavirus.

“It might be sunshiny out and looks nice, but the threat hasn’t disappeared. Everyone needs to continue to be cautious and listen to public health authorities,” Scott said. “We’re not an island and the virus will somehow escape us. Now, it’s becoming clear this is the case.”