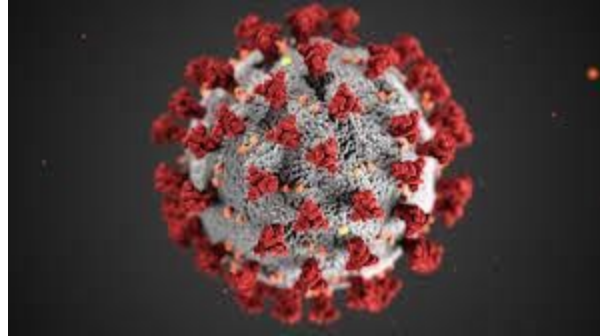


County health officer explains 'burst' in new coronavirus cases

May 21, 2020



Del Norte County's Public Health Officer, Dr. Warren Rehwaldt, released two letters to the community Wednesday, May 20, with updates on the latest developments during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Jump in confirmed cases

Rehwaldt first addressed the jump in confirmed coronavirus cases that brought the total last week from four to 15 as of Wednesday. He said all the new cases over the weekend were mild and the patients were all at home in self-isolation recovering. The new cases that followed were the result of investigating people who had close contact with the original cases.

"I want to emphasize that this burst of cases is not related to the relaxation of stay at home orders on Friday, but is more likely because of movement across borders and a little bit of people losing focus on social distancing," Rehwaldt explained. "We have been hearing more and more reports of people not wearing masks in stores and have seen more vehicle traffic than a month ago. It seems that people have relaxed their guard a little bit over this last month. And we get that."

Rehwaldt said he understands the effects of cabin fever, but preventative measures remain as important as ever.

"Social distancing, wearing masks and good hand hygiene are all still critical to getting through the pandemic safely. We are asking everyone who might be a little skeptical to look at our numbers now. And we are asking everyone to be ready for more cases to come," he said.

Last Friday, Rehwaldt released a health order outlining safety measures, which includes having masks or face coverings with you all the time. The order states people must wear masks or face coverings indoors in public places and businesses with face-to-face contact.

“It is not mandatory in children, and no child under 2 should try and wear a face covering,” Rehwaldt explained. “But for older children and teens it is a good idea to wear masks just like adults.”

Contact tracing

Rehwaldt said when the health department discovers a new case, staff interviews that person as soon as possible and tries to find everyone that they may have had contact with. He defined a close personal contact as being around someone for more than 10 minutes.

“What we want to do is to prepare everybody for the process should they end up having a test that is positive for coronavirus. We want you to understand what it is that we would be calling you about, and what type of information we would want to know. If everyone knows about this and does a little preparation along these lines in advance, it makes the job of contact tracing go much quicker and much easier,” Rehwaldt said.

Reopening businesses

Rehwaldt said last week Gov. Gavin Newsom’s office and the State Health Department gave small counties the green light to move early into Stage 2 of reopening. If jurisdiction could “attest” to the readiness of opening, restaurants and other retail establishments could reopen with COVID-19 precautions in place.

“We submitted our statement to the State Health Department attesting our readiness to proceed on May 14,” Rehwaldt said. “We were happy to receive word the next day that we had been approved.”

Rehwaldt said the County Health Department divided the business eligibility into two sections to ease the transition. Starting this week, restaurants were allowed to open for indoor dining. Also, on the first list were daycares, thrift stores, clothing stores, furniture stores, auto dealerships as well as landscapers, pet groomers, tanning facilities, golf, and office-based business. Each had to submit a plan to reopen following a long list of precautions outlined by both the county and state.

“For the owners and operators, there are references to set up their particular business in a new way, that can often be found on the CDPH website, as well as references from the Del Norte Economic Resiliency Team, who have worked very hard to prepare for this day, and have pulled together a lot of resources for businesses to help with their planning,” Rehwaldt said.

He added to check the CDPH website for the preferred checklist that owners can apply to any business.

Rehwaldt said the second set of business and activities, Cohort 2 of Stage 2, are eligible to reopen around June 3 and include car washes, “destination” retail (which includes everything else not mentioned above), dental offices, summer camps and schools.

“Obviously, schools, in general, are not able to reopen this late in the school year,” Rehwaldt said. “We are reserving the option of moving some of these in Cohort 2 ahead to Cohort 1 so that we can treat people fairly. Specifically, dental offices have a priority, but their requirements are more complicated than most, and we need to make sure they have everything they need before they can safely reopen.”

Rehwaldt said any other business not on the state's approved list must wait for their turn at a later stage of the California reopening plan.

"We can't ask for any more 'relaxation' of these rules," he said.

New coronavirus related children's illness

Rehwaldt then pivoted to "scary" news out of New York and other places of an affliction to children that may be related to COVID-19 called a multi-system inflammatory syndrome, (MIS-C).

The rare condition showed up in children in hospitals with rash, fever (especially sustained fever), red eyes, swollen and red hands, and red cracked lips. Rehwaldt said these children seem to have a severe reaction to being ill with the virus, at least most of the time.

"Some have been quite ill and needed critical care and several children died," Rehwaldt said. "A lot of the symptoms suggest Kawasaki disease, which is a rare inflammatory condition that sometimes affects the heart and arteries of kids as they recover from an illness, and has long been thought to be related to a virus or viruses."

While Kawasaki disease was first identified in 1967, Rehwaldt said it's still unknown if there is a connection between the new condition and Kawasaki disease. Although very rare, Rehwaldt said a child with the new condition would need care in a major hospital that can take care of very sick children.

Rehwaldt recapped next what is known about the COVID-19 coronavirus. Initially, symptoms included fever, cough and shortness of breath. But other symptoms have become quite prominent with the virus, including symptoms of the stomach flu (diarrhea, vomiting), headache, body aches, chills, sore throat and loss of taste and smell.

"This last one, the loss of taste and smell, is unusual in most respiratory infections, and really should prompt someone to get themselves checked out," Rehwaldt urged.

Testing

Local testing capacity for the virus has improved. Rehwaldt said there is a new quick test site at the Redwood Acres Fairgrounds in Eureka, that is now up and running and available if people are having trouble getting into a doctor locally. While not a drive-up clinic, residents can make an appointment by calling or going online, and it is free for those who are uninsured, Rehwaldt said. Redwood Acres is located at 3750 Harris St. To learn more go to <https://lhi.care.covidtesting> or call 888-634-1123 to make an appointment.

Rehwaldt said the DNPH office is working next week to see to get a similar service in Del Norte County, at least a few days a week.

Rehwaldt said if you've been tested and are awaiting results, prepare for a potential positive outcome by jotting down a list of everyone that you can think of that you might have been in contact with, going back to at least two days before you think that you started having any symptoms of COVID-19.

“The reason for going back that far is because it appears that most people can start spreading the virus for 2-3 days before they start to feel sick,” Rehwaldt said.

The list should include names, phone numbers, day of contact and type of contact, such as at the store.

“If you are being tested for COVID, have a positive test, are on quarantine for suspicion of COVID, or just recovering from COVID, you must let the 911 dispatch person know that information if you have to call for an emergency for anyone in your household,” Rehwaldt said. “This is a vital courtesy for our first responders, who need to be able to prepare to protect themselves when they transport someone who has the disease.”

Relaxed, not lifted

Lastly, Rehwaldt reminds residents that while stay at home orders have been relaxed, they have not been eliminated.

“This is especially true for those families with high-risk persons in the home and those who are over 65,” Rehwaldt said. “These are the people we need to protect the most, and for them and the families that live with them, sheltering in place is the best protection.”

Rehwaldt said “high risk” includes such conditions as diabetes, obesity, heart disease, chronic liver and kidney disease, chronic lung disease, immune disorders. “The important thing is that as the ‘shelter in place’ gets relaxed, the coronavirus activity is going to increase,” Rehwaldt added. “Everyone with chronic disease at any age could have a tough time with this virus. Those who are older will definitely have a tough time, and those who are over 65 with health issues or not, may have the toughest time of all. For all of you who fit that bill, stay home and stay safe.”