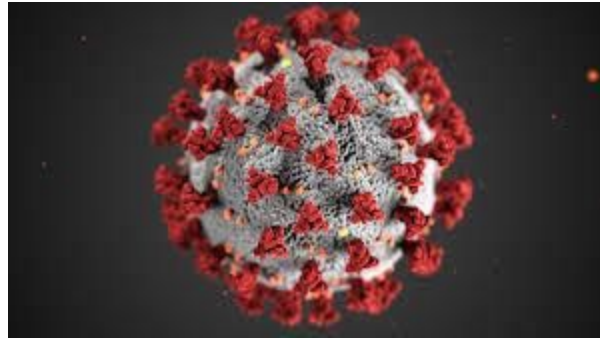


County health officer addresses COVID-19 concerns

April 7, 2020



Del Norte County Public Health Officer Warren Rehwaldt addressed in an open letter to the community April 1 about ongoing concerns over the COVID-19 coronavirus.

To reduce the risk of people from out of the area spreading the coronavirus, Rehwaldt ordered a temporary restraint March 27 on short-stay travelers at vacation rentals, campgrounds and hotels.

“We also were learning last week that many rural areas in California and Oregon were enacting similar measures and we concluded that we should not be the last to do so, as it would make us even more attractive to unnecessary travelers,” he said.

He clarified the closure did not apply to essential workers, including traveling healthcare workers who need places to stay while they are here.

Rehwaldt said his office has been receiving reports and complaints about non-essential businesses that have not complied with the governor’s and county’s directive to close to enforce social distancing guidelines. This includes restaurants, gyms, gift shops, golf courses, churches and, most disturbingly in Rehwaldt’s opinion, beauty salons and tattoo parlors.

“We do not always know the truth of the matter, as when we call, we are hearing ‘closed to public messages’ on business phones. And when we stop by to check, most places have been obeying the order,” Rehwaldt said.

Rehwaldt said a tattoo artist or beauty salon cannot possibly maintain social distance and perform their tasks.

“This is exactly the scenario that we are trying to avoid — one hairstylist who is not having symptoms but has the coronavirus could infect all the customers in the shop for days,” he said.

Rehwaldt explained most stylists spend at least a half-hour close up in their customer's presence, which is more than enough to transmit the virus. That would be enough to start a local outbreak.

"Even if only 10 clients get sick, they could infect 20 more within a week, and then 40 more from those 20 in another week, and so on. This is precisely what we do not want to have happen. Before we even knew about one case, we could easily have 30 or more active or incubating cases on our hands. That really cannot be tolerated," he said.

Rehwaldt added he hopes these shop owners would voluntarily comply with the shutdown order and would rather not have to enforce the order.

A voice recording at Crescent City Tatt N Glass confirmed the business is operating by appointment only. Moises Montanez, owner of Fine Line Design, told The Triplicate he has closed his doors and pushed back his appointment schedule, which had been booked through May, out another month.

Rehwaldt said his office has also fielded a lot of questions about outdoor activities such as golfing and fishing. He outlined golf courses may remain open under certain parameters including:

- no shared carts
- family golfing is preferred
- maintain social distance
- no club rentals or range balls
- disinfect the carts

"We want to keep outdoor activities available that are inherently socially distanced and golf is one of them," Rehwaldt said. "Solo fishing is too, either from the beach or bank."

The social distancing guidelines exclude charter outings and the average fishing boats, which is too small for distancing he added.

"We still want to see people outside, enjoying the outdoors, just not congregating together for any length of time, and none of the usual contact (no hugs or high fives for friends that you happen to see)," Rehwaldt said.

He added the social distancing rules are mostly designed for indoors and for longer than a few seconds while passing someone on a walkway or trail. He still recommends staying home when sick and staying there until completely better.

"For the average person, we define that as at least 24 hours without fever while not using Tylenol or other fever-reducing medication, and symptoms have cleared," Rehwaldt said.

Finally, he addressed conflicting news reports about COVID-19 killing babies while a 101-year-old man survives and goes home.

“Honestly, there is a lot we don't know about the virus and why it behaves the way it does. But we are still mostly seeing the same pattern — children and young adults do well most of the time, and more of those in middle age and beyond have a tougher course,” he said.

Rehwaldt said those at the highest risk are usually the elderly and men are consistently having a tougher time, getting sicker slightly more often than women. He added there is also a lot of misinformation about remedies out there.

“Please ignore them, especially the one about chloroquine phosphate; this is a chemical for aquariums, not a medication. It can poison humans who take it as a medication or supplement,” Rehwaldt said. “There are a lot of people working very hard to find legitimate medications for this virus, but there is nothing proven to work as of yet. We must all be patient.”