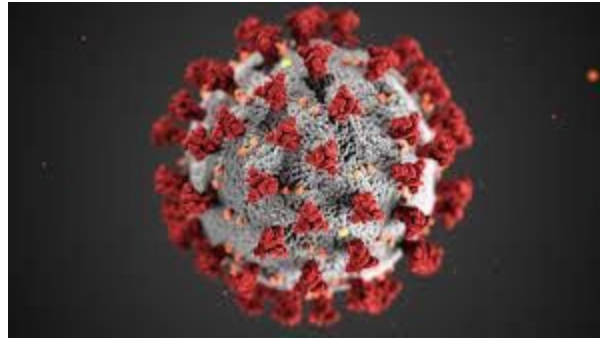


Del Norte County now has two confirmed COVID-19 cases

April 2, 2020



Update April 5

A Crescent City man become Del Norte County's first confirmed case of the COVID-19 Coronavirus April 2. A second county resident tested positive for the virus on Saturday.

Dr. Warren Rehwaldt, Del Norte County Public Health Officer, said in a press release April 2 the first patient is a middle-aged male, who is recovering at home.

"All steps for isolation of the case have been implemented. We are investigating the possibility of travel as a source, but at the moment, the case is still classified as unknown," Rehwaldt said.

The county health office was unable to release information on the second case.

Both patients' identities are being withheld due to Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), a federal law that protects sensitive patient health information from being disclosed without the patient's consent or knowledge.

Dr. Warren Rehwaldt, Del Norte County Public Health Officer, said in a press release on April 2, the patient is a middle-aged male, who is in self-quarantine, recovering at home.

"All steps for isolation of the case have been implemented. We are investigating the possibility of travel as a source but, at the moment, the case is still classified as unknown," Rehwaldt said.

The man's identity is being withheld due to the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), a federal law that protects sensitive patient health information from being disclosed without the patient's consent or knowledge.

Rehwaldt updated his information the health department had on the case during an online conference Friday, saying it was unclear yet how the patient contracted the virus.

“We don’t think it’s travel related. We’re still classifying it as ‘unknown.’ The reason is it is probably wrong to presume community spread until we see more cases we can confirm or identify in any other way. And then we would make the conclusion of community spread. Going to leave it in the unknown category for the moment,” Rehwaldt said.

“This is not really unexpected. I really expected a case before this. From our perspective, it doesn’t change very much. We still want people to do things we’ve been telling them. We still need people to shelter in place. Keep doing the social distancing we’ve been talking about. Pretty much everything is the same. We just want people to sharpen their focus a little more. It’s clear we have a case here and we’re probably going to get more,” Rehwaldt said.

For now, the level of social distancing guidelines has not changed, according to Bill Steven, County Emergency Operations Center Public Information Officer.

“The fact we have our confirmed our first case doesn’t change anything. We’re still preparing plans, still ordering supplies from the state,” Steven said.

One thing that may change soon is the requirement to wear a face mask while in public. Rehwaldt said the county health department has maintained since the beginning of this outbreak that masks or face coverings for well persons were always an option.

“It seems that the expert thinking about this has changed, and there is more discussion about well persons using masks when they leave the home, or if they are around persons who are ill, and of course if they are ill themselves,” Rehwaldt said. “We do not recommend surgical masks for general use, or N95 respirators, as the supply is very depleted statewide and across the nation. We hope to be able to make a recommendation about them in the future as the supply issue improves.”

However, Rehwaldt added, there is a lot of information about homemade cloth masks, and his department has already asked people in the community who are good at sewing to volunteer their services.

“We think that it is reasonable for persons to wear masks or other face coverings when they are outside, for at least the foreseeable future. This may become an order rather than a recommendation depending on what is decided by the state public health teams,” he said. “There is news on this issue literally changing by the hour. We strongly recommend people looking into using a face covering or a cloth mask whenever possible, if they need to leave the home.”

The county has instructions to make your own cloth facemask on its website at <https://bit.ly/3dPiLkJ>.

In the meantime, Steven said Emergency Services Manager Kymmie Scott is in negotiations with local hotels to contract out their buildings in the case Sutter Hospital needs relief from a spike in coronavirus cases.

He added the county is also working with the state to use Del Norte County Fairground buildings as another backup location to house potential patients.

Steven said there will also be no changes in law enforcement of social distancing guidelines limiting gatherings to less than 10 people and maintaining a six-foot distance from others.

“We’re not going to reconsider that right away. We don’t want a knee jerk reaction,” he said. “In a week or two, we still want to be in a position to educate people not to group together. We’re not threatening to arrest or write tickets. It’s still educate, then disperse.”

For the latest information from the county, go to www.co.del-norte.ca.us/departments/health-human-services/public-health.