



PRESS RELEASE- March 26, 2020

Public Health, Emergency Management and Transylvania Regional Hospital Working on COVID-19 Preparedness

“Before anything else, preparation is the key to success,” Alexander Graham Bell once said. With that in mind, Transylvania County Public Health is leading a collaborative effort, along with Emergency Management and Transylvania Regional Hospital to prepare for patient surge and other potential local issues caused by COVID-19.

The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, led by Dr. Mandy Cohen initially emphasized a statewide public health strategy of testing. This resulted in community based testing sites opening in urban counties. Now the strategy has shifted as the Centers for Disease Control released new guidance that prioritizes testing supplies to be used for patients who are hospitalized due to symptoms. This changes how counties prepare.

“North Carolina now has community transmission of COVID-19. Therefore, we are moving to a different phase of our response efforts and will be further increasing our population-based community mitigation strategies. The goal of mitigation is to decrease spread of the virus among our population – especially for those who are at highest risk of clinical severity, and our health care workers – so fewer people need medical care at the same time. In addition, we need to implement strategies to conserve supplies and capacity so our health care workers can care for people who need medical attention even during the peak of the outbreak,” Dr. Zack Moore, State Epidemiologist” shared in his Provider Guidance Memo issued March 23.

Each community receives guidance and epidemiology communications from NCDHHS daily to inform the local response efforts in a pandemic leaving public health as the key local resource in planning. This information is important to help counties know how best to plan.

“Public Health in Transylvania County, and across the state, is playing a leading role in county Emergency Operation Functions in response to the coronavirus. It is the task of local public health to identify population health needs and resources, and then help guide local response in the context of state and federal guidance,” Transylvania Health Director Elaine Russell said.

To prepare for an increase in patients as the virus does spread, State Emergency Management is working in lockstep with NCDHHS to prepare for the statewide healthcare needs generated by the

spread of COVID-19. State EM and local EM Directors are working to locate necessary supplies and to create plans to support hospitals statewide for a potential surge in patients.

“Emergency Management provides logistic support to public health during a pandemic. Our role is to help in sourcing necessary materials and to develop plans that are informed by our experts in public health both at the state level and at the county level. We are both looking for local resources that we can pull in and sending requests through the state system so that the state can work on securing supplies as well,” Emergency Management Director Kevin Shook said.

Hospitals are preparing for the surge in patients with challenges including statewide supply and healthcare personnel shortages. In order to work across the state on these issues, local hospitals like Transylvania Regional Hospital are connecting with both Public Health and Emergency Management in Transylvania County.

“Our hospital is working within our HCA system to prepare for a surge in patients that will need care. We are working with public health officials, including our local health department, to gauge needs that may be coming and to then communicate needs for supplies to emergency management. This system of support from Transylvania County Public Health and Emergency Management is critical as we make plans to meet the community’s needs,” Transylvania Regional Hospital CEO/CNO Michele Pilon said.

In addition to laying groundwork for expanded healthcare needs, state strategies to slow the spread of COVID-19 are in effect and local officials are also considering strategies at the local level. One of those tools being used in some counties include a shelter in place order.

“So far, we have seen cooperation from our citizens to stay home if they can to prevent the spread of COVID-19 while we work to increase our ability to treat patients throughout our hospital systems. Shelter in Place remains a tool on the table at both the county and state levels, but first we have taken local action to work with state and federal authorities to close the public lands in our county and continue to monitor. We cannot emphasize enough how important it is to stay home if you can,” Chairman Mike Hawkins said.

For county government, most functions are required to continue through a pandemic response whether that be Public Health, Social Services, Communications, EMS, Jail Operations, Law Enforcement, Solid Waste or other critical services. Another element to planning is assuring that those mandated services continue as the community faces new challenges throughout a pandemic, including if a local or shelter in place order were issued. This requires county leaders to communicate in scenario planning so that they are prepared to respond and to make critical decisions on resources including how and when to use law enforcement personnel effectively.

“I appreciate the expertise and the effort that Transylvania County has assembled to address COVID-19. I am honored to have such a great working relationship with County Administration, Public Health and Emergency Management here in Transylvania County. With such vast knowledge, experience and dedication, there is not a better group of professionals that I can think of to respond to the challenges we face today. Working together, my office is better able to respond to needs due to COVID-19 and to raise issues as we operate on the front line,” Sheriff David Mahoney said.

One of the concerns of front line emergency response employees is the need for supplies such as masks, gloves and other protective equipment. Nationwide, there is a shortage of supplies that is also

impacting health care providers. State leaders are working on supply chain issues to support statewide response while local leaders are also working to identify needs and address supply. One strategy has included connecting with manufacturers such as Sylvan Sport in Transylvania County who has chosen to take on products outside of their usual scope.

“As a local business, we always want to be a part of the local solution. Sylvan Sport takes great pride in being a community partner and we want to do all that we can to help alleviate supply issues and support our local response,” Sylvan Sport CEO Tom Dempsey said.

That same sense of community collaboration has also started with online instructions on how to make cloth facemasks for use. Already, local citizens and members of the Transylvania County Arts Council are hard at working making the masks based on the CDC guidance provided by the Health Department. To support this effort, the Transylvania County Library will be rolling out a collection campaign so that anyone with supplies to support the COVID-19 response can donate in support of local preparedness.

The graphic below lists supplies needed and how citizens can use the curbside library line to contribute.

Bring us your PPE donations.

The Library is the drop-off site for
Transylvania Public Health.
10:00 AM - 5:00 PM, Monday - Saturday.

When you arrive, call 884-3151 x2.

The library is collecting the following items:



N 95 Masks
Reg. Size 1860
Small 1860S
Duckbill
HANDMADE, TOO!



Procedure
Masks



Exam Gloves
Small
Medium
Large



Full-face
Face Shields



Protective
Procedure Gowns
One Size Fits Most
XL
XXL



Disposable
Shoe Covers

Questions? Give us a call at 884-3151 x2.

Transylvania County Library
212 S. Gaston Street | Brevard, NC 28712