

Bracing for the virus

Written by By Cody Begaye Sun Correspondent
Friday, 03 April 2020 07:18



As towns and cities shutter all non-essential businesses and residents are urged to stay home and isolate, the staff at local hospitals prepare to both test and house, and ideally treat, patients who are stricken with the COVID-19.

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Rehoboth McKinley Christian Health Care Services has closed the door to all non-emergency procedures. Visitors must be screened before they enter the premises, and vehicles can line up for a drive-thru test at one of the entrances.

THE SCREENING

David Conejo, CEO of RMCHCS, described the testing procedure March 25.

As part of the screening process, whether to enter the premises or to get tested, a person is asked if they have had a fever or a dry cough in the past 14 days. These are the two main indicators of COVID-19.

Local hospital details tests, protection

If a person answers these questions and qualifies for screening, they are taken into a mobile unit that is parked in front of RMCHCS where a nasal swab is used to determine whether the person has COVID-19 or not.

The results currently come about three days later, but Conejo said RMCHCS should soon receive tools that will allow for a faster turnaround.

“We want to identify and pinpoint where the patient is, so we could tell them to stay home,” Christopher Gonzaga, MD, said. Gonzaga is part of RMCHCS’s Infection Control Team.

These procedures are done to protect the most vulnerable people, which include elders over 60, people with heart problems, or diabetes, or have other underlying conditions, he added.

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Gonzaga described the priority order of testing, starting with people showing clear symptoms of COVID-19, followed by healthcare and public safety workers, pregnant women, people who are immunocompromised, homeless people, and people who live in congregate facilities like nursing homes.

Next are people who have come into contact with people who previously tested positive, or have recently traveled to overseas hotspots like China and France, then national hotspots like New York or Washington State, and then local areas where cases have been confirmed.

KEEP YOURSELF SAFE

As of March 26, there are 136 positive COVID-19 cases in New Mexico, with three confirmed in McKinley County.

Conejo said, per Center for Disease Control regulations, they can only give general information about the positive cases, such as the person's age and county.

"They want to keep the person's privacy intact," Gonzaga said. "We want to make sure the person is safe and people are more cautious."

Gonzaga also gave information about how the virus is spread.

"It's communicated by droplets, like when you cough, then it sticks into your body and then you put your hands on your eyes, nose, or mouth, which is why you get sick," he said.

Currently, there is no vaccine for COVID-19, which is why the best action is to isolate and reduce the chances of catching it, he added.

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The most frequently distributed pieces of advice are to wash your hands thoroughly with soap for at least 20 seconds throughout the day, especially if you go into a public space, and to isolate yourself at home and not leave unless it is absolutely essential.

Conejo also gave an example of how the virus could spread through common objects like a person's phone, which is why they should be wiped down regularly. Dishes at home should be cleaned in hot water and soap, and common areas should also be regularly cleaned.

In regards to RMCHCS, Conejo said the entire hospital is being sanitized four times a day.

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