Public Health Division

As of March 4, 2020, the County of Santa Cruz has had no confirmed cases of the novel Coronavirus (COVID-19).

The latest information on COVID-19 from the CDC is here:
www.cdc.gov/coronavirus

Información del CDC en español:

來自 CDC 的西班牙語信息:

FROM THE HEALTH OFFICER

The United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has announced that we all need to be prepared for the novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) to spread within the United States. I agree with this statement, and urge our community members to ready themselves, their families, their neighborhoods and businesses. Our lives may be significantly disrupted by the measures needed to respond to the spread of COVID-19.

It is understandable that this information may cause some distress. I want to assure you that we have worked hard to be prepared for this kind of event and are working closely with our community partners to ensure an appropriate response. In addition, our regional, state and federal public health partners are supporting our local efforts with resources and expertise.

The current COVID-19 outbreak clearly has the potential to turn into a pandemic – a global occurrence of an infectious disease. A pandemic is a disaster with unique characteristics. The two most important differences between a pandemic and other disasters are that the whole world is going through this disaster at the same time and people may become fearful of other people. This is a difficult message to share, but it is important to recognize how difficult the times ahead may be.

How the world operates during a pandemic is different from how the world operates normally. This is not business as usual. With a pandemic comes significant disruption to supply chains (the process of how things get from where they are made to where they are used), transportation, and travel. Even if the disease is not spreading in our area, we may face difficulty obtaining the goods and services we are accustomed to, public events may be cancelled, and our ability to travel might be restricted.

The County of Santa Cruz Public Health Division has been working closely with the CDC as well as our state, regional and local partners to manage testing and monitoring of persons who have been exposed to COVID-19. Now our focus is changing from a containment strategy to one of community mitigation – taking steps to lessen the impact of the disease. Along with our public and private partners, we are increasing our ability to respond and are planning for a sustained response. I advise that individuals, families, schools, business and all other sectors of our community take immediate steps to be prepared. Now is the time for you to prepare, visit Ready.gov for resources for the whole community.

The County of Santa Cruz is still experiencing significant influenza activity. If you haven’t gotten your flu vaccine this season, it is not too late. Find local flu vaccine clinic locations in Santa Cruz County.
Public Health Division continues to advise that these steps to prevent the spread of flu will also guard against the spread of COVID-19:

- wash your hands frequently with soap and water, for at least 20 seconds
- use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available
- avoid close contact with people who are sick
- cough or sneeze into your elbow not your hand, or use a tissue and discard
- avoid shaking hands
- clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using regular household cleaning supplies
- avoid touching your face with unwashed hands
- stay home from school or work when you are sick
- call your primary care provider for instructions BEFORE seeking care for flu-like symptoms.

People who are well and healthy do not need to use a facemask to protect themselves from respiratory illnesses. A facemask can be worn by those who are coughing or sneezing to protect others from getting sick. Surgical masks are already in short supply and should be prioritized for use in health care settings.

Beyond these basic preventive steps, the following are the most important things for you to consider to improve your personal and organizational readiness.

- What matters most is how households, neighborhoods, community groups, businesses, and other organizations prepare. What does that mean? Preparedness equals self-sufficiency. Government will help where it can, but it may have a limited ability to respond directly due to the scale of the disruptions.

- Individual and community preparations should focus on three tasks: reducing each person’s chance of getting sick, helping households with basic survival needs and minimizing and coping with larger disruptions in normal day-to-day operations.

- All businesses and other organizations should now review their continuity of operations plans for how they will operate if their employees are unable to work. They should plan how they will interact with members of the public and prepare to implement these plans soon.

- All medical facilities and providers should review their surge plans for how to handle increased numbers of patients and be prepared to implement.

- Getting ready for a pandemic is largely about preparing for possible shortages. In a pandemic, supply chain disruptions are inevitable, but are also unpredictable.

- Since it contains vital supplies, a good start is to make sure your earthquake kit is up to date and ready to go. Of course, having supplies beyond the typical earthquake kit is a good idea. What you decide to have on hand is based on your individual and family situation. Visit FEMA Ready.gov for an Emergency Supply List.

- One likely shortage will be medications. You should try to obtain two to three months’ supply of your critical prescriptions. If you have other critical supply needs, you should conserve them and stock up on them now.

- Now is also the time to think about how you will care for loved ones at home if they or you are sick and how you would limit spread within the family.

- Frequent and appropriate handwashing is far from a perfect solution, but it’s easy, under your control, and has no significant downside.
• You should use a barrier, such as a paper towel or tissue, to touch commonly touched surfaces, such as bathroom door handles or elevator buttons.

• Healthy people should not be excluded from any activities based on their race or country of origin. There is no racial, ethnic or cultural basis for the disease.

In the future we may need to implement further measures in the community. These activities are not imminent, but you should begin to think about their implications.

• Social distancing—staying at least 6 feet away from all other people—will be important

• School closures present a particularly vexing social distancing dilemma but may be necessary to protect the public’s health. These closures may be extensive and extended.

• Event/mass gathering cancellation

• Extensive increase in the amount of remote working or teleworking

• Rationing of critical supplies may need to occur in order to prioritize distribution and use.

• Our community may need volunteers. Think now about the skills you have and how can you help your community. Visit Santa Cruz Volunteer Center – VIP or Santa Cruz County Medical Reserve Corps for volunteer opportunities.

Other public health interventions that have been used with some effect in other countries include commandeering of both real estate or personal property, conscription, curfew and cordons. It is unlikely that these interventions would be used in this country.

Again, it is normal to feel some distress and uncertainty about the impact of COVID-19 on our community. Please rest assured that the County of Santa Cruz Health Services Agency, along with our governmental and private partners, are working diligently to respond appropriately. We will keep you informed of new information as it develops.

General COVID-19 guidance can be found at the following resources:

• Center for Disease Control
• County of Santa Cruz Communicable Disease Unit (local guidance)
• Santa Cruz County United Way or call 211 for more information