

From the Rochester Emergency Committee and Board of Selectmen re COVID-19

This is the 2nd of a series of town mailers to provide updated information about the town's response to COVID-19. The situation is rapidly changing, becoming increasingly urgent that people adhere to safety guidelines for social distancing, by staying home and ceasing non-essential outings. Dr. Erwin Lange of Gifford Medical Center (GMC) Rochester clinic met with us on 3/19 and shared his concerns.

“Our knowledge of symptoms has changed a lot this week,” Lange said. “Last week it was 98% of infected patients would have a fever, but now we know that there is a fair cohort of people who have no fever and aren't aware they are infected, and are out shedding the virus. They think they have a minor winter cold.”

“We now recognize that the reason it is spreading so fast is that we were not counting all those people who were shedding virus, but did not appear to be sick,” states Lange. Social isolation is essential to reducing community spread. It is now understood that asymptomatic people are carriers, such as children who are good virus transmitters but show no symptoms. You could already have it; your children could have it and not know it. “That's why social distancing must not be limited to only 70-year olds,” Lange said. His crucial message is the importance of maintaining social distance, of ceasing non-essential outings, of staying home.

Symptoms and testing

Predominant coronavirus symptoms are fever and shortness of breath with a cough that appears 2-14 days after exposure. Call your doctor if you, or the person for whom you are providing care, develop severe symptoms. The doctor will determine by phone if you should be seen at the Rochester clinic, where your vital signs and breathing comfort will be assessed. The Rochester clinic will follow the GMC protocols and see critically ill patients by appointment.

Testing capacity continues to be limited. “We could use up all our test kits today if we tested everybody who wanted to be tested,” Lange cautioned. If testing is warranted, a GMC medical technician, wearing protective gear, will arrive and swab the nose and throat; the specimen will be sent to the state lab to determine the presence of COVID-19. Commercial labs are gearing up quickly to be able to provide test results sooner. A triage process to rule out flu and RSV may be done before COVID-19 testing.

Reducing Hospital Surge

In anticipation of a surge of COVID-19 admissions, and with a limited number of beds available, GMC is actively planning to sub-divide and expand for greater capacity. “What I heard today is that they are going to try to separate the hospital into a respiratory area and a non-respiratory area. There are negative pressure rooms, which are the preferred arrangement, where air is evacuated out of the building to the outside so that it can't get into the building, then drawing fresh air into the room, so it doesn't spread anything through the air into the hospital building,” Lange said.

Our local hospitals are precious resources upon which we, and our loved ones, depend for critical care—trauma patients require hospitalization, mothers and babies need birthing centers, and other critical cases require hospital space. People will get sick from other causes during the pandemic. By practicing social distancing and self-quarantining, we can reduce hospital surges that will overwhelm both the facility and medical workers.

“Everybody's hope is that many people are going to be able to recover at home, but there are a lot of different social circumstances, some people may not have the means to do that. The goal though, is that the majority of people will be recovering at home,” Lange said.

Dr. Lange offered advice for those recuperating from the virus at home. “Don't smoke, if you smoke. Drink lots of fluids; take Tylenol for your fever. So, pretty much it's stay at home and rest, and drink fluids, as if you had the flu.” About the use of facemasks he said, “They are asking us to save masks for medical care, I would call anyone who is caring for a sick person at home medical care, but I don't know if we are going to run out of masks or not—nationwide that's what they are saying.”

Tips for Caregivers caring for a person with COVID19

If the patient is getting sicker, call his or her healthcare provider and tell them that the patient has laboratory-confirmed COVID-19.

- If the patient has a medical emergency and you need to call 911, tell the dispatch personnel that the patient has, or is being evaluated for COVID-19.

- The patient should not handle pets or other animals while sick.
- You and the patient should wear a facemask if you are in the same room.
- Wear a disposable facemask and gloves when you touch or have contact with the patient’s blood, stool, or body fluids, such as saliva, sputum, nasal mucus, vomit, urine. Throw out disposable facemasks and gloves after using them. Do not reuse.
- When removing personal protective equipment, first remove and dispose of gloves. Then, immediately clean your hands with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Next, remove and dispose of facemask, and immediately clean your hands again with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Place all used disposable gloves, facemasks, and other contaminated items in a lined container before disposing of them with other household waste. Clean your hands (with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer) immediately after handling these items.
- Wash all laundry thoroughly. Immediately remove and wash clothes or bedding that have blood, stool, or body fluids on them, using the warmest temperature recommended on the label. Wear disposable gloves while handling soiled items and keep soiled items away from your body. Clean your hands (with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer) immediately after removing your gloves.

Cleaning and Preventing the Spread of the Virus

- Clean frequently touched objects and surfaces every day using a regular household cleaning spray or wipe.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
- If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.
- Clean all “high-touch surfaces, such as counters, tabletops, doorknobs, bathroom fixtures, toilets, phones, keyboards, tablets, and bedside tables, every day. Use a household cleaning spray or wipe, according to the label instructions.
- Caregivers and other household members should stay in another room or be separated from the patient as much as possible, and **visitors who do not have an essential need to be in the home should be prohibited.**
- Household members should use a separate bedroom and bathroom, if available.
- Make sure that shared spaces in the home have good air flow, like an air conditioner or an opened window, weather permitting.
- Avoid sharing household items with the patient. Do not share dishes, drinking glasses, cups, eating utensils, towels, bedding, or other items. After the patient uses these items, you should wash them thoroughly.

Simple Prevention Tips

- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth; wash your hands with soap and water for min of 20 seconds
 - Stay home when you are sick and avoid close contact with people who are sick
 - Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash

Starting March 30, a volunteer team is available to shop and deliver groceries to quarantined residents and seniors in self-isolation. For grocery delivery call the Rochester Town Office, 767-3631

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