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Serving Crowley & Otero Counties



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PUBLIC HEALTH MATTERS

By Rick Ritter, Public Health Director
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3/15/2020 Coronavirus Update: What's the Plan?

Hello to all. As I am writing this update one of my absolute favorite classical pieces is playing, Piano Sonata No. 8 in C Minor ("Pathétique"). Ahhhh, Beethoven.

Now for a quick local update before we get to the plan. On Friday, 3/13/2020 an individual was tested for COVID-19 and put into isolation. When I get the test results back, I will let you know. Now, to the plan.

An ancient Chinese general by the name of Sun Tzu is credited for writing the statement "Plan for what it is difficult while it is easy, do what is great while it is small." While this statement may mean different things to different people (based upon our backgrounds and experiences), to me the message is very clear: Be proactive, not just reactive. Being proactive means we are going to plan and prepare ahead of time before something bad happens, being just reactive means that, when we have to respond, we might not have everything we need.

For many years, Colorado's Local Public Health Agencies (LPHA) and the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) have been very proactive in planning and preparing for pandemics. In fact, we are required to do so in Colorado Revised Statutes (CRS) Title 25 and Code of Colorado Regulations (CCR) Series 1000. The Otero County Health Department (OCHD) has taken these preparations and plans and tested them in numerous drills and exercises over the years, and we did it for real with the 2009-2010 H1N1 pandemic.

So yes, we have a pandemic plan for Crowley and Otero Counties, and it is being updated on a regular basis. "What is in the plan?" might be your next question. The main plan is called the Public Health Emergency Operations Plan (PHEOP), and it contains several smaller, more specific plans called annexes/appendices. The plan and annexes cover a lot, and they include information on Continuity of Operations (COOP), communications (including risk communication), National Incident Management System (NIMS), mass fatalities, Emergency Support Function 8 (ESF 8), and yes, pandemics.

The pandemic portion of the Crowley and Otero Counties plan includes information on two very important, critical ways to respond to a pandemic: Pharmaceutical interventions and Non- Pharmaceutical Interventions (NPI). Pharmaceutical interventions is a technical way of saying that there will be a vaccine and/or medications to be distributed. The way this is done is through Points Of Dispensing (PODS). This is where

OCHD and our partners (thank goodness for our partners!) set up clinics to give the shots or dispense the medicine to the general public. You might remember the POD in Rocky Ford at the Arkansas Valley Fairgrounds that we set up to respond to the 2009-2010 H1N1 Pandemic.

The NPIs are exactly what the name implies, ways to stop the spread of disease without vaccine or medicine. History shows us that NPIs can be very effective in slowing the spread of disease when the community complies with the orders. We are seeing NPIs being implemented right now, and essentially there are 3 types, namely social distancing, isolation, and quarantine. Social distancing is a non-targeted, general order that says to stay home unless you absolutely have to go out. Schools, churches, and other public places may be closed. Isolation is a targeted order requiring a sick, contagious person to stay isolated until they are no longer contagious. Quarantine refers to isolating people that have been exposed to a contagious disease but are not yet showing symptoms. So, isolation and quarantine are not interchangeable words, though oftentimes we may hear it that way.

Here is your responsibility, where you can make a positive difference. When these orders are issued, it is essential that you follow them. You may not agree with them, and you are entitled to your opinion, but you must follow them. I know that they are disruptive and inconvenient, but remember their purpose: To slow the spread of disease. I assure you that these decisions are not made lightly.

Sun Tzu had it right, plan and prepare for these things before the emergency, not during it. So, it is good all-hazards planning (not just for pandemics) to have extra food, bottled water, and medicines on hand. If it is not a pandemic, it could be a flood (La Junta, 1999), tornado (Holly, 2007), blizzard (S.E. CO, 2006-2007), wildfire (Ordway, 2008), large power outage (S.E. CO, 2011), water outage (Rocky Ford, 2010), the list goes on. And as we have seen with the COVID-19 outbreak, things are flying off the shelves, especially toilet paper. Along those lines, remember in a previous update I told you that I had not bought a single shred of toilet paper since this began, in what will be remembered as the Great Toilet Paper Rush of 2020. Well, guess what: I was FINALLY able to buy some toilet paper, so I and my family are breathing a little easier. Ritter bathroom crisis averted, for now.

Another great way to prepare for emergencies is to take good care of yourself. Eat right, get enough sleep, drink enough water, and exercise regularly. Doing these things will give our bodies and minds the resources they need to respond to emergencies and be resilient!

As always, if you have questions please give me a call at 719-383-3045, and if I am not available, leave me a message and I will return your call when I am able.

Stay tuned for more updates, and remember to:

1. Stay home if you are sick and, if needed, call your medical provider;
2. If you are in a high risk group, take extra precautions;
3. Cover your cough and/or sneeze;
4. Keep your fingers and hands away from your face;
5. Wash your hands a lot; &
6. Stay informed by trusted and reliable sources. Be careful about believing what you read on social media sites. Trusted sources/websites:
 - a. OCHD: <https://www.oterogov.com>
 - b. Centers for Disease Control: <https://www.cdc.gov>
 - c. CO State Health Department: <https://www.colorado.gov/cdphe>
7. Be prepared, not scared!

Until next time,

