



NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NCHD Response to COVID-19

Sterling, Colo. – April 1, 2020: The Northeast Colorado Health Department (NCHD) began monitoring the novel coronavirus in early January, 2020. As more information became available, our emergency preparedness and communicable disease staff implemented our preparedness plan to ensure all systems were in place to respond to the pandemic. In February and early March, our response preparedness activities included sharing health alerts with our local healthcare partners, updating contact lists, monitoring and sharing guidance from the Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment (CDPHE).

Our situational awareness increased the week of March 9-13 when we began to receive an increased number of calls from the public requesting information and when local healthcare facilities began testing for COVID-19. On Friday, March 13, NCHD activated our Incident Management Team (IMT) with Mike Burnett, NCHD Response Coordination Officer, designated as the Incident Commander taking the lead on NCHD's COVID-19 response. In addition to Command, the IMT is comprised of Operations, Logistics, Planning and Public Information. The Operations section is the largest, consisting of three groups. One group coordinates phone triage and staffing and

modification of regular NCHD programs. The second group is comprised of nurses that conduct contact investigations and follow up. Finally, the third group of environmental health professionals conduct business community outreach. The Planning section monitors phone calls, media, situational awareness as well as daily planning. The Logistics section manages and disseminates Strategic National Stockpile supplies and other resources to authorized organizations as needed. The Public Information team disseminates incident response communications to partners, the community and the media.

Monday, March 16, 2020 NCHD's District Operations Center (DOC) was activated at our regional headquarters in Sterling with all positions for the IMT fully staffed to support preparedness and response efforts around COVID-19 in northeast Colorado. The DOC was fully staffed for the first three days before transitioning to a split in-person/remote support model. A few key members continue to staff the DOC with a majority of additional staff supporting the DOC remotely. This response has created unique challenges to coordination among groups, but staff have adjusted well.

"NCHD has been preparing for an event such as this for more than 15 years," said Mike Burnett, NCHD Response Coordination Officer. "NCHD has exercised this facility multiple times over the years bringing in partners from across the region to participate in coordination efforts. Our COVID-19 response has provided the opportunity to practice some of the rarely used procedures and test their effectiveness."

In the past 12 days, 33 NCHD staff members have logged over 3,200 personnel hours supporting activities in our DOC as we manage our public health response, investigation and logistics support for COVID-19. Remaining staff members have kept our offices open and continued to provide core public health services to the public, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), Reproductive Health, Immunizations and Environmental Health services. Strategy within

operations has shifted on a daily basis to accommodate strong social distancing, infection control procedures, and public health orders from both CDPHE and Governor Polis. NCHD's staff, in coordination with numerous healthcare and emergency response partners in our six counties (Logan, Morgan, Phillips, Sedgwick, Washington and Yuma), have risen to each challenge with flexibility, ingenuity and creativity to find effective solutions to the ever-changing circumstances.

"NCHD is honored to be associated with all of these healthcare and emergency response agencies, facilities and individuals," said Trish McClain, Public Health Director. "We are extremely aware of how the various public health orders have disrupted and stressed daily lives. The goal of all of the orders has been to prevent the spread of this virus, to keep everyone healthy and safe."

Northeast Colorado Health Department will continue to work tirelessly to serve and protect the people of northeast Colorado during this current pandemic and we thank everyone for their support and compliance as we work together to contain and mitigate the effects of COVID-19.

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