Local entities prepare for coronavirus spread

Health districts and hospital get ready for the inevitable

By ALEJANDRA BUITRAGO and GRETEL KAUFFMAN
Express Staff Writers

Even though there were no reported cases of coronavirus in Idaho as of press deadline Thursday, Blaine County officials and health care providers are taking precautions to keep residents and visitors safe in the likely event that the novel virus spreads into the state.

“Even if we still don’t have any cases in Blaine County, we take the outbreak and risk of the coronavirus very seriously,” an informational sheet from Visit Sun Valley, the marketing arm of Ketchum and Sun Valley, states. “We want to ease any apprehension or questions you may have about your visit or your plans to visit Sun Valley.”

Visit Sun Valley Executive Director Scott Fortner told the Idaho Mountain Express that between 20 and 25 people, including representatives from the Blaine County commissioners and the cities of Ketchum, Sun Valley and Hailey, attended an impromptu meeting last week.

The gathering had been called to determine whether a patient meets the testing criteria.”

“For us, that’s a pretty significant drop-off in business as long as our community eases apprehensions from our guests and manages their expectations,” the document to the Wood River Valley tourism community states.

Health agency procedures

According to South Central Public Health District Public Information Officer Brianna Bodily, District 5, which includes Blaine County, has not been provided any COVID-19 tests.

“The tests are only available through a couple of designated labs in the state,” Bodily said via email Wednesday. The current procedure is for a health care provider to do an evaluation and coordination with the Health District to arrange for a test. Currently, the district is authorized to request a test at the Idaho Bureau of Laboratories, but providers must consult with Health District staff before sending samples to the state lab.

At this time, patients do not need to show symptoms before being tested, per CDC guidelines, “so our limited supply of tests are used carefully,” Bodily said.

In an email Thursday, St. Luke’s Wood River Public Relations Manager Jay Prudek said, “There is an interview and assessment process for evaluating patients based on CDC guidelines. We work closely with the provider evaluating the patient and South Central Public Health to determine whether a patient meets the testing criteria.”

Prudek said that due to HIPAA and privacy concerns, she could not say whether any tests have been sent to the Idaho state lab from St. Luke’s, but to date there have been zero confirmed COVID-19 cases in Idaho.

No positive tests in Idaho

As of Thursday afternoon, 93 people had been tested through the Idaho Bureau of Laboratories. Of those, zero came back positive for COVID-19.

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