



Working Together to Prepare for Coronavirus in Sonoma Valley

March 6, 2020

Coronavirus is currently top of mind for many in Sonoma Valley, including our residents, businesses, and community organizations. As you are likely aware, the State of California and the County of Sonoma recently made emergency declarations in response to coronavirus (or COVID-19). We recognize that the uncertainty and rapidly changing situation around this infectious disease can create anxiety and fear. What does all this mean for Sonoma Valley, and what is being done locally to prepare for impacts to our community?

By making an emergency declaration, the State and the County are empowered to more effectively respond to the outbreak, seek mutual aid, and potentially obtain cost reimbursement. It also ensures that the County's public health professionals have all necessary tools at their disposal to keep the community safe. The County Public Health Department is working closely with local public health partners and healthcare providers to take action to screen, isolate and test any high-risk individuals to prevent the spread of disease and protect the public's health.

With the major wildfires of recent years, we've become quite experienced in Sonoma Valley at using the nationally recognized emergency management structure for responding to natural disasters. A public health emergency uses a variation on this structure. The County Public Health Department is the lead agency for our community during a public health emergency, such as an infectious disease outbreak or pandemic. County Public Health may direct specific actions to control the spread of disease in schools and in the community, and the Health Officer has legal authority to take actions necessary to prevent the spread of disease. They are the experts and decision-drivers in this public health emergency.

Within Sonoma Valley, our local health care, education, and government organizations have been monitoring the developing situation for many weeks and are in close coordination, with multiple conference calls every week with the County to receive updates and to communicate any particular needs and issues for our community. Among these are daily calls of the County's Health Care Coalition, which includes both our local hospital and health center as well as local senior care facilities, and daily communication among staff from the cities, County Public Health, and County emergency management.

The City of Sonoma, Sonoma County, and other local public agencies have prioritized emergency preparedness over the past two years, and have significantly developed our capacity. Our local elected officials are actively leading and supporting the strengthening of our emergency preparedness and response capabilities. Moreover, because many of Sonoma Valley's public agencies and nonprofit organizations have worked closely together over the past few years to help our community respond to the regional wildfires and power outages, we have established relationships that will serve us well in facing any new emergency. We will work together to bring the most supportive actions possible to our community.

As of this writing, there is no indication that this disease is currently in the Sonoma Valley. However, we have been preparing for the possibility that coronavirus may enter our community, and will be following the direction of County Public Health and utilizing our established processes for emergency management. Each of our organizations has protocols in place that enable us to respond and coordinate in the event that the disease appears in Sonoma Valley.

This is a rapidly evolving situation worldwide, and we encourage you to stay informed about the most current guidelines and advisories, as well as simple ways to prevent the spread of respiratory diseases. Information and resources are currently available and are being updated regularly on the following local websites:

- Sonoma Valley Hospital: www.sonomavalleyhospital.org/coronavirus-2019/
- Sonoma County: www.socoemergency.org/coronavirus

Both of these websites also have links to trusted resources, including the California Department of Public Health, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the World Health Organization.

If the virus does arrive in our community, there is a possibility that schools, businesses, and other organizations will be impacted. Each of our organizations is preparing for the continuity of essential services, but disruption to daily life in our community is a real possibility. We urge everyone to consider their capabilities in light of this possibility and identify potential strategies and resources. As with past emergencies, the situation may become challenging, but we will work collectively to minimize the impacts while keeping our community safe.

The remarkable response by our community members during the wildfires of recent years has reinforced what we all know -- that Sonoma Valley is full of supportive people who help our community to be a better place, and can be counted upon whenever needed. We will continue to work closely with our amazing local non-profits who always rise to local challenges. At our organizations, we want you to know that we are actively preparing, communicating, and coordinating, and will continue to strive to ensure that the most current information and support is available to our community as the situation evolves.

It's an honor for our organizations to work with you and to serve you.

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