



Staging of alternate care sites begins at two school gyms

Expanded capacity would address worst case scenarios for COVID-19 spread

Necessary steps to expand the ability of Yuba-Sutter hospital operations to handle even the most serious scenarios for the local COVID-19 outbreak will be evident today with the arrival of the first round of equipment at two area high schools.

The gymnasiums at Yuba City High School and River Valley High School have been selected as alternate medical sites, and they will soon be staged with beds and medical equipment to handle any surge in the number of patients. This proactive addition of medical space to prepare for the potential increase in severely ill COVID-19 patients is similar to efforts taking place in communities across the country.

"Establishing these two alternate medical care sites is crucial, as we face the possibility of our region being hit with an unprecedented increase in ill coronavirus patients," said Yuba-Sutter Health Officer Dr. Phuong Luu. "We need to plan for the worst case scenarios, but we hope it will never become necessary to fully use those two buildings."

The opening of additional space to address an anticipated spike in medical need is part of a planning process known as "surge capacity." Yuba-Sutter Emergency Services worked with Yuba City Unified School District officials to secure the two gyms, after evaluating several possible sites throughout the two counties.

"Surge capacity planning is integral to our day-to-day emergency operations in an effort to ensure that our local health system, including our only hospital, can continue to adequately support patients and staff," Dr. Luu said.

Dr. Luu said efforts to establish and equip the two sites is in addition to surge capacity work already being done in collaboration with the bi-county Emergency Operations Center, Adventist Health and Rideout, Sutter North, Ampla, Peach Tree, and Harmony Health.

The purpose of these alternate sites would be to provide medical care to COVID-19 positive patients who are deemed stable for hospital discharge but still need to be monitored and require some level of assistance with medications management and other activities of daily living. These patients are considered better suited for a facility that has an open layout to allow limited numbers of healthcare personnel to more easily monitor their status.

"We purposefully began this process early-on to allow our planners ample time to coordinate with our medical community and to secure the needed beds and equipment before those resources become even scarcer," said Yuba County Administrator Robert Bendorf. "These are two sites we hope we never have to fully use, but models we are seeing for the potential spread of the coronavirus compel us to do all we can to get ahead of this threat."

The Yuba-Sutter Emergency Services also secured 500 cots, along with 1,000 blankets and 1,000 pillows for the alternate hospital sites. The two school gyms were ultimately selected based on their size, electrical capacity, locations, and other factors.

"We are very appreciative of the team at Yuba City Unified School District, who have been vital partners in making these sites available and ultimately bolstering the health community's ability to respond to the COVID-19 crisis," said Sutter County Administrator Steve Smith. "Their cooperation allows us to move quickly and efficiently to establish a strong backup plan, should cases grow beyond the capacity of our single hospital."

Dr. Luu said the extent to which Yuba-Sutter residents adhere to the state's Stay at Home order and take extraordinary precautions when they run essential errands will ultimately dictate how many eventually become sick with COVID-19. Current models indicate cases could well-exceed the bed space available at Adventist Health and Rideout, making the alternate care sites necessary.

"It would have been irresponsible to take a wait-and-see approach with COVID-19 before starting the process to set up alternative sites," Luu said. "The risk is very real, and we have to act now to ensure medical resources are available, should we see a serious rise in cases."

For the most current information, check BePreparedYuba.org or BePreparedSutter.org. A bi-county Call Center is also fielding general calls from the public Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. – 5:30 p.m. at 749-7700.

###