

RICHARDSON COUNTY BOARD OF HEALTH

MARCH 18, 2020

An emergency meeting of the Richardson County Board of Health was called to order at 4:00 p.m. on Wednesday, March 18, 2020, by Sheriff Hardesty. He stated for the record and pursuant to Nebraska Revised State Statute 71-501 that members of the County Board of Health are myself, Sheriff Hardesty who serves as Chairman of the Board and Dr. Allan Tramp who is the physician/medical advisor who has been appointed by the County Board each year since 2000 and Mary L. Eickhoff, Richardson County Clerk who serves as the secretary.

Requests were made that the following be present, and all were in attendance for this meeting, Grant Brueggemann representing the SE NE Health Department; Kathy Messner the Community Medical Center; David Sickel, Chairman of the Richardson County Board of Commissioners; Doug Merz, County Attorney; Brian Kirkendall, EMA Director; Gary Jorn representing the City of Falls City and the Falls City Ambulance Squad; Marty Lewis representing the Humboldt Ambulance Squad and Duane Armbruster, Falls City Police Chief and representing the City of Falls City Board of Health.

The Richardson County Board of Health has not been required to hold a meeting until the circumstances before us all at this time have developed into a National Emergency as declared by President Trump on Friday, March 13, 2020, and later that day Governor, Pete Ricketts declared a State of Emergency in Nebraska.

With the precautions being released almost hourly by the media from the National Health and Human Services Department and the Center for Disease Control, the Board concurs that it is essential to the preservation and maintenance within the County of the public safety, the public welfare, and the public health of the citizens in Richardson County to release a statement to the residents of Richardson County, Nebraska on the seriousness of this pandemic virus, coronavirus 19 (COVID-19).

Earlier today, March 18, the coronavirus community planning team had their third meeting. This group includes Richardson County Emergency Management Agency (EMA), medical staff, schools, law enforcement, County Commissioner and nursing homes. Brian Kirkendall, EMA Director provided notes from this meeting. During this meeting and prior meetings they have discussed rumor control in the public. The group stated for everyone to keep posting facts and correct comments. They discussed about how to self-isolate and how to get supplies to those who are self-isolated. The group feels that the best way to self-isolate is for people to stay home. They have developed a script for people to deliver when needed the supplies to self-isolated houses to maintain distance and not have direct contact with the infected person. Sunmart has been contacted and they have the capability to take orders over the phone and the pharmacy already have online ordering and delivery. Today everyone was asked to send a needed Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) supply list to Richardson County Emergency Management Agency to be forwarded to State Emergency Management. The group has mostly focused on prevention and control of the spread of the virus. EMA have sent out several different flyers and posted a lot of information to social media.

At this time the County Board of Health will take the necessary action to safeguard the health of the people in Richardson County and request that all residents follow the guidelines and regulations adopted and promulgated by the Department of Health and Human Services regarding the COVID-19.

We encourage everyone to practice these simple tasks to help ward off this virus:

- **Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- **Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- **Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.

**Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.

**Stay home when you are sick, except to get medical care.

**Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.

And, if you develop and experience the following symptoms and have been in close contact with a person known to have COVID-19 or if you live in or have recently been in an area with ongoing spread of COVID-19, please call your doctor office and report your symptoms to avoid spreading illness. Symptoms may appear 2-14 days after exposure.

**Fever

**Cough

**Shortness of breath

The Richardson County Board of Health recommend and strongly encourage everyone living in Richardson County to heed the guidelines of the CDC and HHS in an effort to effectively curtail the spread of this virus so life as we all are accustomed to can resume more quickly.

It was explained by the Board that the biggest concern for Richardson County is all the get togethers that happened over the past week with all the community events that were held where large crowds were gathered. If we can get through the next 2 weeks without any cases it will be an encouraging sign.

At the current time, testing is limited due to the number of kits available at Richardson County medical facilities and testing is not done unless there is suspicion that the patient may have been exposed or hospitalized on significant symptoms. Medical personnel, emergency responders and law enforcement are high priority for screening. Test results do take several days and up to 7 days sometimes to get results. Some patients are classified as what they refer to as "under investigation" and are requested to be monitored.

The Board also stated that we do not want a peak in our area because it will overwhelm the medical staffing and facilities in Richardson County. Information was provided on how the spread of the virus could overwhelm the medical staffing and facilities in Richardson County.

If a positive case is reported in the County, it was indicated that the NE Department of Health will tell medical professionals what to do. The Nebraska Department of Health contacts the provider first and then they contact the patient and do the history of where they have been and whom they have been around. Because testing is limited, if there is a suspicion that a patient may have the virus because of a possible exposure, the Nebraska Department of Health is notified for them to investigate the history of where they have been, etc. The NE Department of Health could become overwhelmed and may not have the staff to continue this monitoring, then what happens and perhaps then local Emergency Management Agency would be called in to assist with this. This is another item that County Health Board needs to address so that the community is ready.

Hospital capabilities, if we do not have a spike in cases then it will have a fighting chance to treat patients effectively. Respiratory support equipment is very minimal.

If necessary, it was reported that the hospital is set-up to put into place a tent triage in the parking lot. Some supplies are limited and when placing orders are finding that things are not currently available and are on back order.

If residents get sick medical facilities are urging patients to call in to their doctor office and provide their symptoms. The recommendation is self-isolation and advise them to stay home and they are monitored from there. If a patient feels that they are needing to be seen because of trouble breathing they will give the patient instructions on how to come into the office for further evaluation and treatment.

Self-isolation is currently not enforceable. Need to work through the scenarios now so that if a situation comes up where someone is not staying in self-isolation, then what do you do. If someone were arrested, what do you do with them.

Sheriff Hardesty stated that if emergency personnel and law enforcement get sick, 40% even, we will be in a bad situation.

The Board then stated that the following items should be placed on the next meeting agenda:

- 1) The SE NE District Health Department needs to know who to contact and work with, a chain of command to follow, when cases are confirmed and if the hospital is overwhelmed and finding an alternative facility for treating patients and getting plans and the supplies and preparations made to get this into place for operation within a day if needed. Dr. Tramp and the Sheriff were both in agreement that Brian Kirkendall, the EMA Director should be the 1st person/agency in the County the SE NE Department of Health would contact.
- 2) Procedures need to be put into place for serving those who are unable to get food or supplies as needed because of isolation, who would see to those needs and if county, city and even school district employees would be permitted legally to provide these services if needed.
- 3) Law enforcement needs to be advised on what authority they have to enforce any mandates that are put in force by the Governor of the State of Nebraska.

Plans are being made to schedule a meeting within the next few days to continue with planning and making preparations to prepare for a peak to care for those affected with the virus if needed.

Sheriff Hardesty, Chairman
Richardson County Board of Health

Mary L. Eickhoff, Secretary
Richardson County Clerk