

COVID-19: What Harris Regional and Swain Community Hospitals Are Doing and What You Can Do

It probably feels as if coronavirus – or as it is officially known, COVID-19 – is all anyone is talking about these days. As COVID-19 and other respiratory illnesses like the seasonal flu continue to spread across the U.S., you also may feel a certain level of concern over how this disease could affect you or your loved ones, or if your local healthcare provider is prepared to respond to any local cases that may arise. That's certainly understandable and natural. We want to provide you with essential information outlining what we are doing to stay prepared and offer you guidance on what you can do to help protect yourself, your family and our community.

What we are doing

Swain Community and Harris Regional hospitals are committed to providing the highest quality care and ensuring the safety of our patients, employees, providers, volunteers and visitors at all times. While COVID-19 is new, effectively responding to other infectious diseases is not. We have tested processes and plans in place to respond to situations involving infectious disease year-round. Here is what we are doing to stay ready and effectively respond to COVID-19:

- We continue to work closely with the Swain County Health Department and Jackson County Department of Public Health and follow guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to ensure that we are prepared with appropriate plans to detect, protect and respond should anyone in our community contract or be exposed to COVID-19.
- We have a robust emergency operations plan in place and are reviewing and proactively completing a number of preparation checklists out of an abundance of caution.
- We have hand hygiene products easily accessible throughout our facility.
- We are screening patients in our emergency department, inpatient units and outpatient clinics based on CDC guidance.
- Staff treating a potential COVID-19 case are provided with all appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) to help prevent exposure.
- Patients with respiratory or COVID-19-related symptoms are immediately provided masks to wear to help prevent exposure to others.
- In the event that we identify a potential COVID-19 case, we will follow all CDC guidelines for placing that individual in isolation for their care and for the protection of other patients, employees and visitors.
- We have implemented visitor restrictions at our facility as follows:
 - Swain Community Hospital: Visitation has been suspended to the hospital inpatient unit until further notice.
 - Harris Regional Hospital: HRH is asking the community to voluntarily restrict visitation with family members or friends currently in the hospital. Harris Regional Hospital is evaluating temporary visitation restrictions and will provide additional guidance on Monday.
- We have/are in the process of rescheduling non-urgent outpatients services, when deemed clinically appropriate, for 30 days.
- We have rescheduled all elective, non-urgent surgeries, when deemed clinically appropriate, for 30 days

These measures are in place to protect our facility and our community. Please know that our providers and clinical teams are well-trained and prepared to manage outbreaks of infectious diseases, including COVID-19, seasonal flu and other respiratory illnesses.

What you can do

It's easy to feel helpless when faced with a barrage of news reports and social media updates regarding COVID-19. The good news is that there are some key steps you can take to help protect you and your loved ones and help prevent the spread of respiratory illnesses, including COVID-19:

- Avoiding close contact with people who are sick
- Avoiding touching your eyes, nose and mouth
- Staying home when you are sick
- Covering your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throwing the tissue in the trash
- Cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched objects and surfaces, including your phone, computer, remote controls and doorknobs
- Washing your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom, before eating and after blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing
- Using an alcohol-based sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not readily available (Always wash hands with soap and water if hands are visibly dirty)
- Practicing social distancing behaviors, including working from home, avoiding public gatherings and unnecessary travel, and maintaining a distance of approximately six feet from others when possible.

What to do if you are experiencing symptoms

First and foremost - if you are having a medical emergency, you should call 911 or go directly to the Emergency Room. If possible, notify the dispatch agent that your emergency involves symptoms possibly related to COVID-19.

For non-emergency needs, if you need medical attention due to respiratory illness symptoms (fever, cough, shortness of breath) and plan to visit our hospital, your primary care provider or an urgent clinic, please call ahead before you go and let them know that you are experiencing symptoms that may possibly be related to COVID-19. This will allow providers to properly prepare for your visit and take the necessary precautions to keep others from being infected or exposed.

Please be reassured that our number one priority is the health and well-being of our community – and that includes you. We are prepared to manage an outbreak of respiratory illness, and we encourage you to follow the guidance above and stay tuned to updates from the CDC to help protect you and your loved ones. Keeping our community healthy is a community effort, and we are committed to doing everything we can to keep our community healthy today and for generations to come.

For more information and to stay abreast of the latest updates on COVID-19, you can visit Swain Community Hospital and Harris Regional Hospital's COVID-19 preparedness page at MySwainCommunity.com and MyHarrisRegional.com.