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Oregon releases health care system action plan to fight COVID-19

New projections show social distancing must be maintained to protect health care system

(Portland – March 26, 2020) The fight against the coronavirus depends on Oregon hospitals having enough beds to treat the coming surge in patients who will become seriously ill with the virus. Today, Oregon health officials and hospitals announced a joint [statewide action plan](#) to dramatically bolster the state's ability to treat people with COVID-19 illness who need hospital care.

The plan was developed by the "Governor's Joint Task Force for Health Care Systems Response to COVID-19," convened by the Oregon Health Authority (OHA). It includes a broad range of health systems, health care providers, human services organizations, public health and public safety agencies, insurers and other organizations needed in the battle.

The plan addresses 4 urgent actions necessary to expand the health care system's capacity and maintain its capability as Oregon braces for a projected spike in new coronavirus cases:

1. Procure and distribute critical medical supplies, including personal protective equipment (PPE) for health care workers and ventilators.
2. Optimize hospital capacity to be able to treat COVID-19 cases.
3. Mobilize the health care workforce to respond to COVID-19.
4. Maintain a unified, coordinated and transparent emergency response to COVID-19.

[New projections of COVID-19 cases in Oregon](#) show the state is at a critical moment in the fight against the disease. Social distancing measures could alter the trajectory of new infections, which gives Oregon's health care system the chance to ramp up to meet the coming surge. But the state has little margin for error. A return to "business as usual" or slight differences in actual infection rates (compared to projected ones) could swamp hospitals with more coronavirus cases than they could treat.

Governor Brown said, "Hospital leaders and health officials are doing their part to find beds, secure supplies and protect health care workers. Oregonians can make a difference too: stay home and save lives. We all have a role to play in an unprecedented, unified effort across Oregon to stop the coronavirus from taking the tragic toll we've seen it claim elsewhere."

State agencies, hospitals and health care providers have already begun to implement the plan.

- The state is collecting PPE for re-distribution to facilities in need.
- Regional hospitals have signed mutual aid agreements to shift equipment, workforce and patients from overburdened facilities to others with adequate capacity.
- The state is working with providers to stand-up alternate care locations (such as the Oregon Medical Station), identify and develop new alternate care sites, enable ambulatory care centers to house patients and re-purpose long-term care facilities.
- The state and hospitals are sharing hospital bed utilization data so hospitals can manage the use of beds and equipment across their region.

- The state is developing childcare options for health care workers, so their work isn't interrupted by school closings and family responsibilities.

OHA Director Patrick Allen said, "Oregon's health care system began preparing for a pandemic years ago, which gave us a head start on this plan. From expanding testing to securing more ventilators for Oregon hospitals, we are united by a set of common strategies to save lives in every corner of the state."

The latest models state health officials released today forecast the following outcomes for 3 different scenarios:

- **Return to business as usual:** If Oregon lifted all the social distancing measures state leaders have instituted in recent weeks, there will be an estimated 15,000 cumulative infections by May 8th (within a range of 5,900-26,000). Approximately 1,100 people would need inpatient beds (850 AAC/250 ICU) across Oregon.
- **Maintain bans on large gatherings and indefinite school closures:** There would be an estimated 6,100 cumulative infections by May 8th (within a range of 2,000-12,000) and 340 people will need inpatient beds (260 AAC/80 ICU).
- **Maintain aggressive interventions put into place on Monday, March 23rd (i.e., Stay Home, Save Lives) with high public adherence:** There will be an estimated 1,000 (within a possible range of 700-3,800) cumulative infections by May 8th. Under this scenario, hospitals would have to boost capacity by a smaller number of beds.

The models show that only aggressive interventions, like the Stay Home, Save Lives executive order Governor Brown issued on March 23rd, are predicted to decrease the number of active infections.

The models state health officials released today were prepared by the Institute for Disease Modeling. While similar to projections completed earlier by researchers at Oregon Health and Sciences University (OHSU), these newer models from IDM take into account the impact of community-level social distancing interventions, which were not incorporated into the OHSU study. Researchers from OHSU and other hospitals are collaborating with OHA to forecast the COVID-19 burden for their specific hospitals based on this information.

Dr. Dean Sidelinger, state health officer at OHA, said: "These projections tell us the sacrifices Oregonians are making right now can save lives. At the same time, they paint a dark picture of what could happen. We can't afford to drop our guard."