



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 7, 2020

Area first responders bracing for projected late-April COVID-19 peak

HOT SPRINGS – At the virtual meeting of the Hot Springs/Garland County COVID-19 Task Force on Monday, March 6, local hospital and first-responder representatives reported they are hopeful the virus-related hospitalizations remain low, but they are prepared for a possible surge as the state’s peak is forecasted for the last week in April.

Although COVID-19 data for Arkansas provides optimism, there is concern that asymptomatic carriers of this contagious virus could cause the numbers to continue to increase.

“If you think you may have contracted COVID-19, either because you are starting to show symptoms or you have been exposed to someone who has been symptomatic or tested positive, it is critically important that you obey the quarantine order and stay at home,” Hot Springs Fire Chief Ed Davis said in reference to a report of a symptomatic COVID-19 patient picking up prescriptions at a local pharmacy this weekend.

For those who are symptomatic, the Hot Springs/Garland County COVID-19 Call Center/Hotline is available at 501-760-4307, from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily, as a first line of triage in an effort not to overrun our hospitals. The hotline is also available for adjoining and nearby counties, for which Hot Springs serves as the regional healthcare provider. Another option for anyone exhibiting symptoms is to call their primary care physician. Calls to 9-1-1 should be solely limited to anyone requiring an emergency response.

Deliveries of food and/or required medications to the elderly, disabled and other high-risk individuals by medically-screened and vetted drivers is available by Sheep Dog Impact Assistance of Central Arkansas by calling 501-712-5514, extension 707.

Quantities of personal protective equipment (PPE) in our area remains adequate. Bo Robertson, Garland County Emergency Management Director, shared that a third shipment of PPE arrived last Friday from the Strategic National Stockpile (SNS), which is earmarked for first responders.

Chris Rowland, of the Garland County Health Unit, and Garland County Health Officer Dr. Gene Shelby cited recent statewide statistics relating to COVID-19 hospitalizations that illustrate remaining capacity should there be a rise in cases this week. Currently, a total of 31.7% of statewide hospital beds are unoccupied. As of the Governor's COVID-19 press conference on Sunday, there were 67 hospitalized in Arkansas with 27 on ventilators. At today's press conference, there are 74 COVID-19 patients in the hospital, and 22 are currently on ventilators. Rowland said the current projection is for the state to hit its peak on or around April 25.

Only one first responder with LifeNet is currently out due to COVID-19-related issues, and there are no area hospital healthcare providers sick with the virus.

The Garland County Sheriff's Office reported an increase in calls over the weekend relating to domestic and personal wellbeing issues. There was a similar rise two weeks ago, but it since stabilized before the uptick again over the weekend.

For help in dealing with stress and coping with the anxiety, social distancing and other emotionally-challenging aspects of this crisis, please visit the "Stress and Coping" tab on the CDC's webpage at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/index.html>.

The United Way of the Ouachitas (UWO) continues to seek funding to assist area residents affected by the pandemic. The most critical needs continue to be food, utility and rental assistance. Along with already securing a couple of grants and applying for many more, UWO has established a COVID-19 Relief Fund. Those receiving aid are required to prove COVID-19-related employment issues. Donations can be made at www.bit.ly/UWO-COVID, by calling 501-623-2505 or by mail at 233 Hobson Avenue, Hot Springs, AR 71913.

The online resource guide continues to be updated daily at www.hsresourceguide.org. Included is information about available area daycares.

For those still needing to file taxes, UWO continues to offer assistance. UWO will process tax returns for individuals by appointment by calling 501-623-2505.

Public health officials continue to stress the importance of washing hands often, keeping social distance, staying home when sick and disinfecting surfaces often. For more information, visit <http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus>.