

June 10, 2020

**STATEMENT FROM:
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Chief Operating Officer and Administrator,
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While most regions in Arkansas have seen a decline in COVID-19 cases, Northwest Arkansas is experiencing a surge in community spread of the virus and is now leading the state in confirmed total cases of the virus, with Washington County at 1,185 cases and Benton County at 1,090 cases as of this morning. Washington Regional views this as a serious public health emergency.

Over the past month, Northwest Arkansas has witnessed a significant increase in the number of hospitalized individuals with COVID-19. On May 12, there were four COVID-19 positive patients in Northwest Arkansas hospitals. Since then, we've seen the number of hospitalizations double every week, and we now have more than 70 COVID-19 positive patients in area hospitals. Washington Regional is also seeing more critically ill COVID-19 patients, with over 30% of those hospitalized requiring ventilator support. As cases increase, Washington Regional has accepted transfers of positive COVID-19 patients from other hospitals in Northwest Arkansas, North Arkansas and Western Oklahoma.

It is important for our community to understand that we are not seeing more hospitalizations simply because more testing is being done. We are seeing more hospitalizations because more people in our area are being infected with the virus.

Over the past week, Washington Regional has seen a 170% increase in the number of COVID-19 tests performed at its screening clinics, a 156% increase in calls to the Washington Regional COVID-19 Hotline and a 350% increase in the number of hospitalized COVID-19 patients.

To address the rapid spread of COVID-19 in our community, Washington Regional has made two significant operational changes this week. First, on Tuesday, June 9, we opened a second inpatient unit to care for suspected and confirmed COVID-19 patients, which means we can now provide treatment for 38 COVID-19 inpatients with the ability to expand capacity as necessary. Care in these units is overseen by a dedicated team of intensivists, hospitalists and infectious disease physicians.

Second, beginning today, June 10, we have re-opened the Washington Regional Coronavirus (COVID-19) Clinic at 3318 N. North Hills Boulevard in Fayetteville to address the increased demand for screening and testing. This clinic is dedicated to COVID-19 screening and testing of individuals who do not have any symptoms but who may have had a direct exposure to someone who is COVID-19 positive. We will continue to evaluate, treat and test patients with active respiratory illness or other COVID-19 symptoms at the Washington Regional Urgent Care location in Fayetteville, located in the William L. Bradley Medical Plaza at 3 East Appleby Road.

Washington Regional wants the community to be assured that Washington Regional is prepared for this surge. Over the past several months, our team has planned and prepared for this pandemic and we have the staff, supplies and resources to effectively respond while continuing our customary health care operations. We have the capacity to safely provide care for all in our community - not just those who require hospitalization due to COVID-19.

We believe it is of great importance that every member of our community hear the message that it is critically important to take the recent surge in COVID-19 cases seriously. In the early days of the pandemic we saw a tremendous outpouring of support for health care workers. Here is what the community can do to help us now – **wear a mask when out in public, practice social distancing, regularly wash your hands, avoid large gatherings, and stay home when you are sick.**

Washington Regional remains here for you. Please, do your part to help slow the spread of COVID-19 and protect our community.

About Washington Regional:

Washington Regional is the only not-for-profit, community-owned and locally governed healthcare system in Northwest Arkansas. Its comprehensive healthcare network consists of a 425-bed medical center and more than 55 clinic locations. Washington Regional is committed to improving the health of people in communities it serves through compassionate, high-quality care, prevention and wellness education. Visit wregional.com for more information.

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