

The latest message from the Mayor about COVID-19

Dear Ridgway Community –

As we learned this morning of the first official case of COVID-19 in Ouray County, I wanted to reach out about a couple of things.

First, we're hearing of (and seeing) a lot of young people in our community gathering around town and not practicing social distancing. I can't stress enough the need for that to stop. I realize how hard this is on everyone, but it's the primary way we're going to lessen the impact of the pandemic locally. Parents, please stress to your kids that the reason they need to maintain the six-foot distancing and avoid physical contact with their friends is so they don't potentially expose you, their grandparents, or other at-risk individuals to the virus. The better we are at practicing good distancing and hygiene, the sooner we can return to some sense of normalcy.

The other thing that's causing some controversy in town is the question of testing. Many folks are clamoring for more testing, and that's understandable. We're all reading about how countries like South Korea are controlling the spread of the virus through mass testing, then quarantining positive cases.

The problem is, in this country there still are simply not enough tests. As a result, the only people who qualify for testing are those with active symptoms. The production of testing swabs is increasing rapidly, but we're so far behind, as a nation, that the priority for testing has to be the regions with the most serious outbreaks. Think of it as another example of the pros and cons of living where we do: because we're relatively remote and have low population density, we're very low priority for mass testing. We should be able to control the spread simply by abiding by the stay-at-home order protocols and practicing good hygiene.

That said, everyone involved with managing this event locally believes that testing is of the utmost importance in order to manage the pandemic, and it eventually needs happen on a large scale if we are to return to any semblance of 'normal'. We continue to request more test kits on a daily basis, and will continue to make those requests. Hopefully more active infection testing options will become available as well. In a bit of good news, Mountain Medical Center has been working in concert with Ouray County Public Health to obtain more COVID-19 tests for our County. Yesterday, OCPH was able to secure 30 additional tests for Mountain Medical Center from Montrose Memorial Hospital.

As to the possibility of accessing the antibody blood test that's ongoing in San Miguel County, the public needs to understand the unique circumstances that enable that test to be implemented there: first, that the County initiated a strict "shelter-in-place" order to limit the immediate spread of the virus; second, that the company that makes the test provided it for free; and three, that San Miguel county has much greater resources, both in terms of manpower and monetarily, to do the testing. Ouray County would have to pay to test our residents, as well as find the personnel and personal protective equipment to do the testing, and we simply don't have the resources to do that.

I thank you all for everything you're doing to "flatten the curve" and wish everyone continued good health!

John Clark
Mayor
Town of Ridgway