



Bay Area hospitals ready to expand ICU capacity

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WALNUT CREEK, Calif. (KRON) – Many counties like Contra Costa County are ready to expand ICU capacity if or when it's needed.

The county has two temporary field medical stations, in addition to hospitals that are also ramping up their capacity.

One of the hospitals that have done so is John Muir Medical Center in Walnut Creek.

Well just like any other hospital, right now they're experiencing a surge in patients but say the ICU is doing okay for now.

The Medical Director of the Emergency Departments says if they near capacity, they have several levers they can pull to expand within the hospital system.

In Contra Costa County, more ICU beds are filling up.

“We are now down to only 13% occupancy capacity available in our ICU's here in the county. Bay Area-wide is 12.9% so in Contra Costa what that means is out of our 166 ICU beds, only 25 of them are available now,” John Gioia said.

Contra Costa County Supervisor John Gioia says if hospitals reach capacity, there are temporary medical stations available, like the one at Craneway Pavilion in his district in Richmond.

The 255-bed station was set up in April and hasn't been needed yet.

“Our health department can get them up and running and staff in 2 to 3 days if they're needed,” Gioia said.

Hospital leaders hope it won't come to that.

The medical director of John Muir Health Emergency Departments, Dr. Russell Rodriguez, says the hospitals are also expanding capacity.

“We have developed what we consider alternative care units wherein our one campus we have utilized an area that is generally used for other, non-urgent care and we’re converting that into a treatment space and that’s more for overflow emergency department patients, not the acute patients, not the respiratory patients,” Dr. Russell Rodriguez said.

Dr. Rodriguez says these alternative care units will likely be needed if people disregard the stay-at-home order and get together for the holidays – yet again.

“If we walk into the Christmas holiday with that level of patients in the hospital and we do what happened at Thanksgiving again, it’s going to be very problematic throughout the entire state and country,” Rodriguez said.

Despite the grim reality of hospitalizations right now, Dr. Rodriguez says he is hopeful after receiving his first dose of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine on Wednesday.

“Without us getting sick and having to be put on leave, we know that we’ll be able to manage this surge of patients much better,” Rodriguez said.

John Muir Health says they expect to do 500 vaccinations by the end of the day throughout its two campuses in Contra Costa County.

They expect a majority of staff and physicians to receive the first dose over the next three weeks.

If you need medical assistance in the emergency departments, they say don’t wait, they’re prepared to take care of you.

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