



For Immediate Release

Contact:
James A. Patry
System Director, Marketing
(603) 326-5606
james.patry@avnhh.org

North Country Healthcare Affiliates to Re-Establish Services

Northern NH – Consistent with the New Hampshire Governor’s Re-Opening Task Force and Centers for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines, North Country Healthcare affiliates have begun preparations for a phased-in return of a number of services.

Over the past several weeks, many health services have remained available to provide care in multiple formats (including telehealth). However, beginning May 11, Androscoggin Valley Hospital, North Country Home Health & Hospice Agency, Upper Connecticut Valley Hospital, and Weeks Medical Center will resume a number of procedures and offerings, previously suspended due to COVID-19 concerns. The implementation timeframe of each care phase will be dependent on maintaining an appropriate supply of personal protective equipment (PPE) and staff resources, while monitoring patient volume and hospitalizations.

Phase 1 will include a return to time-sensitive surgical procedures at facilities where they have historically been performed. Outpatient clinic appointments (including for many specialties) previously suspended will also slowly return. During this phase:

- Centers for Disease Control (CDC), State and Federal guidelines will be monitored and followed
- Staff will continue to be screened daily before beginning work (including temperature)
- Reminder calls for appointments will be conducted for new patients to assess risks/concerns of COVID-19. Questions regarding patient symptoms, recent travel, contact with any individuals infected or potentially infected, will be asked.
- Patients will be screened at their vehicle, as able or at the facility entrance at the time of arrival. Questions regarding COVID-19 symptoms (fever, chills, body aches, loss of taste/smell, etc.) will be asked.

- Handwashing/hand sanitizing of patients and staff will continue to be emphasized upon arrival and discharge. Hand sanitizer will be available at facility entrances.
- Exam rooms and equipment will be sanitized after patient visits
- Lobbies will be appropriately cleaned regularly
- Social distancing will be promoted by signs and markers within member hospitals
- No waiting area will be open, unless absolutely necessary. Appropriate cleaning will continue to occur.
- Patient appointments will be staggered to reduce patient interaction
- Patients will be brought to the exam room immediately, as able
- No paperwork will be completed at the reception desk unless it is determined to be necessary
- Use of the affiliate's Patient Portal will be encouraged
- Appropriate COVID-19 testing will continue to be conducted, as supplies allow and CDC guidelines recommend
- No visitors will be allowed at NCH hospitals, unless in rare exceptions (one support person for labor/delivery (Androscoggin Valley Hospital); a caregiver is necessary for care (all facilities); end-of-life care (all facilities))
- Verbal and online communication will continue to keep patients, providers and staff updated with changes
- Time-sensitive procedures for patients with pain, will resume on a staggered schedule, ensuring surgical patients do not recover in the same area at the same time
- Masks will be worn by all patients, providers, nurses and staff
- Pre-registration and verbal consents will be encouraged, to minimize unnecessary in-person interactions.
- Departmental reception desks including registration will have floor markings at six-foot intervals to ensure proper social distancing.
- Home health and hospice services through North Country Home Health and Hospice Agency will be available for patients who are at high-risk and who continue to shelter in place. Services including COVID-19 testing, as appropriate, can be administered in a patient's home.

All NCH affiliates monitor and frequently communicate their supply of PPE. It is important to note that should the supply unexpectedly be of concern, the next phase in the re-establishment of services will be delayed, to best ensure the safety of our patients, providers, and staff.

Additional messaging regarding future phases of services at our facilities will be communicated in advance of their implementation.

“North Country Healthcare hospitals and North Country Home Health and Hospice Agency providers, nurses and staff have contributed significant time and research into the careful development of our phased-in approach to resuming services for patients in our communities,” commented Tom Mee, RN, BSN, MBA, Chief Executive Officer, North Country Healthcare.

“We are committed to re-establishing a number of care offerings in a manner that is safe for everyone within our facilities and within their homes.”

The Emergency Departments of all NCH hospitals remain open and ready to treat medical emergencies. However, please call your primary care provider if you are exhibiting the following symptoms:

- Fever
- Cough
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing (in extreme cases, visit an Emergency Department or call 9-1-1 immediately)
- Chills
- Repeated shaking with chills
- Muscle pain
- Headache
- Sore throat
- New loss of taste or smell

If you experience the above symptoms, but don't have a primary care provider, please call 2-1-1. If you are a patient of Upper Connecticut Valley Hospital, please call 388-4259. If you are a patient of Weeks Medical Center, please call 788-5656.

Please note that visitor restrictions to our hospitals (including Cafeterias) and off-site clinics remain in-place.

As this phased approach begins, it remains important to continue to take these preventive measures:

- wash your hands often with soap and water or hand sanitizer;
- avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth;
- avoid contact with sick people;
- stay away from large crowds as much as possible.

For updated information about COVID-19 and North Country Healthcare's initiatives, please visit northcountryhealth.org

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