



NCH Update on Island COVID-19 Cases and Testing *April 2, 2020*

Nantucket Cottage Hospital has now confirmed nine positive cases of COVID-19 on the island, and while this may seem like a relatively small number, we want to emphasize that the coronavirus threat is still very real, vigilance is imperative, and we must continue to stay home, practice physical distancing, and adhere to all the measures put in place to protect our community.

For most of the COVID-19 cases we have confirmed, we know of presumed positive family members and social contacts, all of who are appropriately quarantined but not counted in the total number of confirmed cases. In a household with a COVID-19-positive patient, they have likely already spread the virus to those in close contact, before their symptoms developed. So if those people develop symptoms a few days later, or not at all, they are presumed to be infected and not necessarily tested. The entire family of a COVID-19 patient is ordered to remain quarantined together for 14 days after exposure, and receives extensive CDC-issued instructions and guidance to prevent further infections. In addition to being quarantined, contacts of positive patients are instructed to monitor their symptoms and seek help if needed. These individuals are educated on the most current testing indications and that in their particular situation there is not always clear guidance, but clinical judgment plays a large role. We also understand there is a false negative rate to consider with the COVID-19 testing, and not only do we recommend to those who have tested negative to maintain isolation, we have decided to retest some of those individuals in which there is a strong suspicion of a COVID-19 diagnosis.

The bottom line is that the coronavirus is here on our island, and there are almost surely more cases than have been confirmed. NCH and other Massachusetts hospitals are making every effort to expand testing capacity and our turnaround time for the island has improved, but widespread or voluntary testing is unlikely in the short term. While the community spread of the virus on Nantucket that we are aware of to date has not been extensive, that is only because our town and hospital leaders acted early and decisively to protect Nantucket with emergency orders and guidelines around physical distancing. So we urge the community to continue adhering to these critical measures to prevent any further spread on Nantucket in the days and weeks ahead. Please stay home, wash your hands, and limit trips to the grocery store as much as possible. Everyone in the community is making sacrifices during this challenging time and we appreciate the collective efforts of our island.