Phoebe Continues to Wait on COVID-19 Test Results

Albany, Ga. – Hundreds of people in southwest Georgia continue to wait on COVID-19 test results. More than 380 people tested by Phoebe Putney Health System have not yet received results, some have been waiting for a week. That number includes healthcare workers tested after potential COVID-19 exposure at work, but the vast majority are community patients who showed symptoms of the virus. “Our entire health system only received two patient test results Tuesday. One person being treated for COVID-19 symptoms at Phoebe Putney Memorial Hospital tested positive, and one person being treated at Phoebe Sumter Medical Center in Americus tested negative and was released. At least 67 patients in Phoebe’s main hospital in Albany are awaiting test results,” said Scott Steiner, Phoebe Putney Health System Chief Executive Officer. Six confirmed patients are in Phoebe’s main hospital, and three confirmed patients remain at home.

Phoebe tested more than 100 patients Tuesday on the second day it operated a drive-through collection site. Only patients who are pre-screened by calling a special hotline are screened at that site. “An increase in the number of COVID-19 is not unexpected. We know the virus is in our community, and we urge everyone to heed the warnings to avoid crowds and practice social distancing. We continue to treat dozens of patients with COVID symptoms, and we know some of them will test positive. All we can do is provide them the best possible care while we wait for those results,” said Steven Kitchen, MD, Phoebe Putney Memorial Hospital Chief Medical Officer.

Some test results did trickle in for Phoebe employees tested after potential COVID-19 exposure on the job, and all of those employees have tested negative so far.
“With so many patients being treated under COVID-19 protocol, our care teams are using a tremendous amount of personal protection equipment (PPE), and that’s putting extreme stress on our supply chain,” Steiner said.

Phoebe’s supply management team is working night and day to identify alternative supply sources. “We’re buying from sources we have never considered before, but we’re doing whatever is required to protect our people,” Steiner said. Phoebe has also filed two official requests with the Georgia Department of Public Health for emergency supplies. Tuesday, the state delivered an emergency shipment of N95s and the federal government delivered a small amount of N95s, masks and isolation gowns from the federal Strategic National Stockpile. “We need and greatly appreciate assistance from our state and federal partners. We’ve even gotten some supplies from South Georgia Medical Center in Valdosta and Southwell in Tifton. Area hospitals are really committed to working together through his health emergency,” Steiner said.

Over the weekend, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) temporarily eased regulations on certain medical equipment, no longer requiring Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approval before those supplies are used in a healthcare setting. A Phoebe team of supply chain, infection control and medical staff members immediately went to work figuring out a way to mass produce facemasks that, for instance, could be used by patients in the Phoebe Cancer Center and employees doing mandatory temperature screenings at all hospital entrances. “We had one of our physicians suggest these masks could be placed over the N95 respirators our team members caring for COVID-19 patients must wear. N95s are in extremely short supply right now. By putting a facemask over an N95, a worker could then simply properly dispose of the facemask when leaving a patient’s room and continue to use the N95,” Dr. Kitchen said.

Tuesday, a group of Phoebe employees gathered in a conference room to produce those masks for potential use if the situation gets to a point where that is necessary. “I never thought I would see anything like this in my healthcare career, but that’s where we are today. The normal supply chain for medical supplies in the United States is overwhelmed with demand because of COVID-19 right now, and we’re having to find innovative ways to ensure our staff has the equipment they need to care for our patients,” Steiner added.

For updated COVID-19 information, visit phoebehealth.com/coronavirus and cdc.gov.