FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Southwell takes precautions to prepare for coronavirus

(March 13, 2020, Tifton, Ga.) – While Southwell’s facilities have not had any confirmed coronavirus cases yet, the health system is taking precautions to prevent the spread of the virus.

Southwell is closely monitoring developments and continuously preparing for the potential impact of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) in the communities we serve. We have already activated our Emergency Incident Command structure across our enterprise to monitor and help direct our strategic and operational efforts. Our infection prevention team has been working closely with local and national agencies and preparing our clinical teams to address potential new cases and questions.

Effective immediately, Southwell will expand visitor restrictions to prevent the spread of all respiratory illnesses, including COVID-19 at all facilities.

“In light of the first cases of COVID-19 now reported in Georgia and several cases linked to Southwest Georgia in particular, Southwell is taking this additional measure to protect the health of our patients, their loved ones, and our staff,” said Dr. F. David McEachin, MD, Chief Medical Officer for Southwell.

Visitors will be limited to immediate family members at Tift Regional Medical Center, Southwell Medical, and Southwell Health and Rehabilitation. Visiting hours will be limited from 9:00 am to 7:00 pm, and only one visitor will be allowed at a time for up to two hours per visit. If a patient has a confirmed COVID-19 diagnosis, no visitors will be allowed.

Entrances at Tift Regional Medical Center will also be limited to the main 20th Street entrance and the Emergency Department entrance on the corner of 20th Street and Lee Avenue. Southwell Medical patients and visitors will be limited to the main entrance. All visitors and patients who go through these entrances will be screened for possible COVID-19 symptoms.

Southwell will limit visitors with patients who come to all outpatient clinical facilities to one visitor per person.

Southwell has also suspended non-essential vendor, volunteers, and student access privileges in order to reduce traffic. Southwell’s updated visitation policy can be found at www.tiftregional.com/COVID-19.

While Southwell recognizes that support from friends and family can play a positive role in the healing process, they encourage all friends and family to utilize other forms of communication such as phone and video calls rather than face-to-face visits.
Southwell is also continuing to require that visitors use hand gel when entering and exiting all hospitals and outpatient facilities to minimize the spread of germs. Patients presenting to the ER and outpatient clinics who show possible coronavirus symptoms will be immediately required to wear a face mask to try and minimize the potential spread of the virus.

A hotline is also being implemented by Southwell where individuals who are worried they may have the virus or for those who have questions about the virus, can call and speak to clinical staff. **The number for the hotline is 877-719-5787.**

In addition to these measures, Southwell is also working to educate all staff on proper protocols and procedures regarding COVID-19 to ensure the safety of all patients, visitors, and staff.

“We also urge members of the public to practice proper hand washing, which means washing hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, particularly after blowing your nose, coughing, sneezing, or having been in a public place,” said Dr. McEachin. “If soap and water are not available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.

“We also advise to try and avoid touching your face and high-touch surfaces in public places like elevator buttons, door handles, handrails, etc. If you must touch something, use a tissue or your sleeve to cover your hand. You should also wash your hands after touching surfaces in public places, and it is recommended you clean and disinfect your home to remove germs regularly, particularly with frequently touched surfaces like tables, doorknobs, light switches, handles, desks, toilets, faucets, sinks, and cell phones.”

Southwell also recommends avoiding crowds, particularly in poorly ventilated spaces, and to avoid non-essential travel. Based on this recommendation, Southwell has canceled Community Care Day and is monitoring travel by all staff members.


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**About Southwell**

Southwell is a leading health care provider serving 12 counties in South Central Georgia. Tift Regional Medical Center (TRMC), the flagship hospital, is a 181-bed regional referral center offering signature services in surgery, oncology, cardiovascular care, women’s health and more. Southwell comprises of TRMC and the TRMC West Campus in Tifton, Southwell Medical Hospital and Southwell Health and Rehabilitation in Adel and over 30 primary care and specialty clinics located throughout the region. Please visit www.tifregional.com for more information.