Executive Office of the Mayor

Mayor Bowser Unveils District's Alternate Care Site

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Connect With Us
John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20004
Phone: (202) 727-2643
TTY: 711
Email: eom@dc.gov

Ask the Mayor

Muriel Bowser
Mayor

(Washington, DC) – Today, Mayor Muriel Bowser was joined by local and federal officials, as well as members of the Bowser Administration, to showcase the conversion of the Walter E. Convention Center into an alternate care site to support the District's coronavirus (COVID-19) medical surge response.

"Our hope is that as Washingtonians continue working together to blunt the spread of COVID-19, we never get to the point of needing to use this site. But if we end up needing additional hospital capacity, these beds are here and ready for patients," said Mayor Bowser. "We are very grateful for all of our local and federal partners who worked quickly to get this site ready to go in just a few weeks. And we are very grateful for all the people in our community who are making sacrifices and doing their part to save lives and keep our city safe and healthy."

The Convention Center's Hall A, through the coordination of more than a dozen local and federal agencies, can now accommodate 437 beds and is ready to accept 100 patients this week.

"This amazing care facility is one of dozens the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has built across the country with FEMA and our local partners to help save lives during this pandemic," said Lt. Gen. Todd T. Semonite, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Commander. "Working with our great partners here in Washington, DC, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Baltimore District team has built a top of the line facility and delivered it in just three weeks."

The alternate care site will begin accepting low-acuity COVID-19 patients when District hospitals approach surge bed capacity.

"This site is a huge commitment to preparation and public safety," said Jack Sava, MD, FACS, Chair of Surgery at MedStar Washington Hospital Center and MedStar's medical team lead on the alternate care site. "Preparing for the worst is never easy or convenient, and it takes a lot of discipline to build a hospital we might never use. I'm amazed at what can happen when people share a goal and an understanding of urgency."

The site is fully stocked with general medical and emergency medical supplies, including: items from two Federal medical station caches, 50 Cardiac Monitors and 50 AEDs, pharmaceuticals from the Strategic National Stockpile, ability to do onsite radiology and ultrasounds, multiple nurse stations with easy access to patient rooms

and Nurse call system that alerts staff to emergencies in each care space, shower, or bathroom.

“The achievements of the whole-of-America response to the COVID-19 pandemic have been a result of our strong intergovernmental partnerships. Nothing exemplifies these important partnerships more than the development and execution of the Alternate Care Sites nationwide,” said Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Administrator Pete Gaynor. “In support of the District of Columbia, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Health and Human Services, and FEMA worked together to increase hospital bed capacity and address surge. We are grateful to our federal and local partners for their support as our shared top priority remains the safety and security of the American public.”

The site will also include:

- Dedicated patient showers
- Dedicated staff showers and lounge area
- Dedicated fire alarm system
- Dedicated IT networks for staff, patients, and equipment
- Dedicated oxygen system
- Multiple redundant power backups

“The District of Columbia National Guard is proud to support our community with the development of this new facility,” said Maj. Gen. William J. Walker, Commanding General of the District of Columbia National Guard. “I am proud to represent these soldiers and airmen, who demonstrate they are trained and ready to support and defend the Nation's capital. During these trying times, it is important that we come together as one to continue to protect our loved ones, and co-workers and we will get through this together. We are DC Strong!"

The Convention Center is overseen by Events DC, the official convention and sports authority for the District of Columbia.

“During these extraordinary times, we recognize the critical role that we play in supporting our community by providing the Walter E. Washington Convention Center as alternative care facility,” said Gregory A. O’Dell, president and chief executive officer of Events DC. “Our hope is that we will help relieve the burden of the local hospital system and ultimately save lives. To our Mayor, city emergency leaders, the dedicated healthcare professionals and first responders across Washington, DC – they are the true heroes of our time - and for them we remain grateful.”

More than a dozen local and federal agencies were involved in the construction of the site including: U.S. Army Corps of Engineering, Federal Emergency Management Agency, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps, DC Health, DC Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency, DC Department of Public Works, DC Department of General Services, DC Fire and Emergency Medical Services, District Department of Transportation, DC National Guard, and Events DC.

For more on the District’s COVID-19 response, visit coronavirus.dc.gov.