North Dakota finalizes hospital surge plan for COVID-19 response

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BISMARCK, N.D. – Gov. Doug Burgum and Chief Operating Officer Tammy Miller today outlined the finalized hospital surge plan for North Dakota, expressing confidence that the state has the hospital capacity it needs to handle a surge in COVID-19 patients if one should occur.

Burgum noted that North Dakota is currently using less than 1 percent of its hospital capacity for COVID-19 patients, and the state's positive test rate of 3.1 percent is the second lowest in the country, with 341 confirmed cases out of 10,916 total tests.

"While our hospitalizations remain low and we don't believe that any additional health care facilities beyond hospitals' own Tier 1 capacity is going to be needed, it is our responsibility in government to prepare for the worst-case scenarios, and in that regard, our state is well-prepared," Burgum said during today's press briefing.

The surge plan was developed through the state's Unified Command in partnership with health care providers across North Dakota.

"Our mission is to protect the citizens of North Dakota and to minimize the loss of life and economic hardship," said Miller, who co-leads the Unified Command with Maj. Gen. Alan Dohrmann, director of the Department of Emergency Services. "As we put together this plan, the overarching goal is to ensure that our hospitals and communities will have the resources they need to handle any surge in COVID-19 patients."

For the purpose of surge planning, the state identified bed capacity in 50 hospitals based on three tiers:

- **Tier 1 – 2,098 beds:** existing hospital capacity with current staff, supplies and equipment.
- **Tier 2A – 2,394 beds:** hospitals increase their bed capacity and stretch staff through scheduling, with a surge of equipment from the state medical cache as requested.

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- **Tier 2B – 3,488 beds:** hospitals further increase capacity with a surge of equipment, supplies and staff from the state.
- **Tier 3 – 4,000 additional beds:** This tier involves setting up minimal care facilities that would be used only if hospitals in the region have reached their maximum level of surge capacity with beds, supplies, equipment and staff that can be provided through state resources. Minimal care facilities could provide up to 4,000 additional beds, pushing the statewide total to nearly 7,500 beds.

The North Dakota Department of Health will monitor hospital surge and determine when and if a minimal care facility is needed. Miller stressed that minimal care facilities are not alternative hospitals, but rather are set up and organized to handle COVID-19 patients who may need hospital admission but, based on hospital capacity and triage priorities, that level of care isn't available.

In the unlikely scenario that they would be needed, Tier 3 facilities would open first in Bismarck and Fargo. The state has pre-positioned 200 beds each at the Fargodome and University of Mary Fieldhouse in Bismarck. Each Tier 3 facility would be overseen by a lead hospital. Sanford Health would be the lead hospital in Fargo and Bismarck, in partnership with Essentia Health in Fargo and CHI St. Alexius Health in Bismarck.

If necessary, six additional Tier 3 facilities could be opened in the state's other metro areas. Those locations and lead hospitals would be:

- **Devils Lake:** Lake Region State College gym, overseen by CHI St. Alexius Health-Devils Lake
- **Dickinson:** Dickinson State University's Weinbergen Gym, overseen by CHI St. Alexius Health-Dickinson
- **Minot:** Minot State University Dome, overseen by Trinity Health
- **Grand Forks:** University of North Dakota Wellness Center, overseen by Altru Health in Grand Forks
- **Jamestown:** University of Jamestown Newman Center/Larson Center, overseen by Jamestown Regional Medical Center
- **Williston:** Williston State College's Thomas Witt Leach Complex, overseen by CHI St. Alexius Health in Williston.

For more information on the state's COVID-19 response, visit www.health.nd.gov/coronavirus (http://www.health.nd.gov/coronavirus) or www.ndresponse.gov (http://www.ndresponse.gov).

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