

## **MARCH 23, 2020 - LATEST LOCAL INFORMATION ON COVID-19**

Jackson County government and public health officials are advising residents to be extra vigilant in their individual efforts to help prevent the spread of coronavirus, or COVID-19.

Today, local health officials confirmed that a part-time Jackson County resident has tested positive for the virus. This confirmed case in Jackson County did not receive care at Harris Regional Hospital.

State and federal privacy laws limit the amount of information local officials can release at this time about the case.

Health Department Director Shelley Carraway said during the investigation stage of this pandemic, testing was of utmost importance.

“Now that we have community transmission in North Carolina, we are in the mitigation phase,” she said. “As a community, we should be staying home as much as possible to slow or stop the spread of COVID-19.”

Carraway urged residents to limit travel to meeting basic and essential needs.

She said the Health Department and Animal Shelter are both reducing staffing to a minimum.

“Measures such as these will stagger the amount of staff working onsite, minimizing their potential for exposure and maintaining our workforce for response in this public health emergency,” she said.

The Health Department continues to provide essential services onsite or via telephone.

Acting Jackson County Manager Heather Baker said residents can help slow the spread of COVID-19.

“By each individual acting responsibly, we all will help to promote and secure the safety and protection of all citizens,” she said.

To that end, Jackson County encourages residents who must venture out – for groceries or medical appointments – to maintain social distancing of at least 6 feet from other individuals.

Also, please remember to:

- Frequently wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds at a time.
- Refrain from touching your face.
- Use hand sanitizer.
- Cover coughs or sneezes (into the sleeve, elbow or a tissue, not hands).
- Regularly sanitize high-touch surfaces.

While these are important steps for everyone to take, they are critical to the wellbeing of those at high risk of severe illness: anyone over 65 years old or individuals with an underlying health condition, such as heart disease, lung disease, diabetes or a weakened immune system.

Also today, Gov. Roy Cooper banned gatherings as of Wednesday, March 25, of 50 or more people, closing movie theaters, gyms and fitness clubs, bowling alleys and sweepstakes parlors. Barbershops, salons and some other businesses also will be closed.

Businesses that remain open are encouraged to take the temperatures of employees and customers before allowing access.

Organizers of smaller gathering should consider canceling, postponing, or modifying their events, local officials said.

Jackson County, representatives of the local municipalities, law enforcement and emergency and medical officials, are meeting daily. Officials expect to issue additional guidelines moving forward.

“We intend to be proactive in taking any and all necessary steps,” Baker said. “We also plan to keep residents informed as the situation evolves, through website postings, social media announcements and through area news outlets.”

Jackson County has opened its Emergency Operations Center to coordinate use of resources and personnel for first responders, fire departments and Emergency Medical Services.

“With this activation, we are also assisting the hospitals and urgent care centers utilize these resources, as well as dispersing personal-protective equipment from the state to protect emergency and medical personnel,” said Todd Dillard, Jackson County emergency management director.

Harris Regional Hospital has been equally aggressive in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.

“We have implemented a few precautionary measures to protect our patients, staff and community including rescheduling elective and non-urgent surgeries and outpatient services for at least 30 days,” said Steve Heatherly, HRH president and CEO. “We continue to enforce our zero-visitor policy.”

Heatherly said the hospital is working closely with the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services and the N.C. Healthcare Association; additionally, medical personnel are following guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

“An important element to our preparedness is minimizing the risk of exposure in any way we can as we navigate this rapidly evolving situation and prepare for what the next few weeks may hold,” he said.

To stay informed locally, visit [www.jacksonnc.org](http://www.jacksonnc.org) and click on COVID-19 information, found at the bottom of the page. On Facebook, follow Jackson County Emergency Management (@jacksonNCEM).

If you are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 or believe that you have been exposed to COVID-19, seek medical attention. Either call the Health Department at 828-586-8994 or contact your primary care provider. In the event of an emergency, call 911.

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