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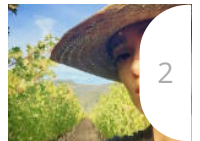
Healdsburg District Hospital in Healdsburg. (Alvin Jornada / The Press)

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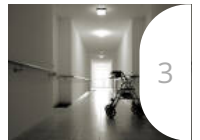
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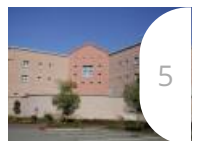
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October 29, 2020, 8:20PM | Updated 2 hours ago



The group of employee coronavirus infections at Healdsburg District Hospital has slightly increased, and the first worker contracted the infectious disease in late September, two weeks earlier than hospital officials originally said.

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The hospital disclosed Tuesday that 12 employees tested positive for COVID-19 between Oct. 10 and Oct. 24, and that number now is up to 14 workers with the first positive employee test on Sept. 27, hospital officials said Thursday.

One more employee infection emerged after the hospital tested 287 of its 320 workers on Monday. Hospital officials had no explanation Thursday about the circumstances of the first worker to be infected on Sept. 27.

Dr. Sundari Mase, the county's health officer, said Thursday public health staff determined the Sept. 27 infection likely was the first case of the "cluster" of Healdsburg hospital employee infections.

Hospital officials also said they've learned through contact tracing of workers who tested positive that at least one worker spread the virus to a colleague, making the two cases related. The two people worked closely together and socialized on breaks at work.

County epidemiologists are still "trying to put the puzzle together and see how many more (infections) are related," Mase said.

The county health officer said one more related infection at the hospital would make three and constitute a COVID-19 outbreak. The county and

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hospital are continuing a contact tracing investigation and more virus testing is expected, Mase said.

All 320 Healdsburg hospital workers to be tested after 12 test positive for coronavirus

In fact, Jim Schuessler, the Healdsburg hospital CEO, said on Friday that more testing of employees will be done to see if any infections were missed during the mass testing conducted Monday.

As of Thursday, there's been no coronavirus transmission detected from hospital workers to patients, Schuessler said, calling it the "principal silver lining, if there is one."

Still, county public health workers will be contacting any patients who were in the hospital during the past month who might have come in contact with an infected worker to make sure patients potentially exposed can get tested for the virus.

Schuessler said anyone who has been at Healdsburg hospital in the past month may contact hospital officials if they are concerned or have questions about their health.

"If they have symptoms, they should let us know and let (county) public health (staff) know," he said, adding that former patients can get tested at drive-thru testing sites operated by the county.

Gina Fabiano, a hospital spokeswoman, said Thursday she did not know how many of the 14 workers who recently tested positive for COVID-19 showed symptoms of the virus. She also didn't know how many employees had returned to work following their isolation at home.

"Nobody should be worried because the same protocols that have been in place since day one are still in place," Fabiano said, alluding to the hospital's daily employee screenings which include

temperature checks. “There’s been absolutely zero transmission confirmed between a staff member and a patient. That is really important for folks to understand. The patients are not showing any signs of any transmission.”

The hospital CEO said there had been “a handful” of previous instances since the pandemic started in mid-March, when employees have tested positive for the virus — all of them unrelated infections and none constituting an outbreak at the medical center. The recent spate of 14 cases represents the first large COVID-19 cluster among employees in a short period, he said.

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