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North Country Public Health Network uses UCS to manage COVID-19 response in northern NH

REGION— With an eye on the health and safety of Northern NH, the North Country Regional Public Health Network (RPHN) is keeping stride with its mission, while events surrounding COVID-19 continue to unfold.

The North Country's RPHN is one of 13 in New Hampshire. RPHNs were established to provide a way for public health services to be delivered at the local level, including measures to prepare for, and respond to, public health emergencies.

COVID-19 is casting a light on RPHNs, which are relatively unknown to the public. Behind the scenes, the North Country RPHN has been ramping up activity; the North Country MACE—or Multi-Agency Coordinating Entity— was activated on March 18th with five overarching entities at the helm.

The City of Berlin, the Towns of Bethlehem and Lancaster, Littleton NH Emergency Management, and the North Country Health Consortium (NCHC), together, share the responsibility to manage the regional response to COVID-19. Together, these entities have assembled a team to staff a Unified Command Structure (UCS) – a mechanism for managing hazards that is in use across the country. Staff of the UCS include employees from Ammonoosuc Community Health Services (ACHS), Upper Connecticut Valley Hospital (UCVH), NCHC, and will involve others as the need arises.



"The Fire Service is used to using the Incident Command Structure during daily local responses. A response this complicated that involves the entire North Country PHN requires the staff and resources of many agencies working to coordinate all aspects of this pandemic," said Chief Jack Anderson of the Bethlehem Fire Department and Emergency Management Agency who assumes one of the Unified Commander roles on the regional COVID-19 response team. "I want to thank the leadership of the North Country Health Consortium for quickly identifying the need to bring in outside assistance with expertise in helping develop this Unified approach to planning and response."

Representing an active collaboration across agencies and the region, the Unified Command structure assumes several roles between its members.

In order for community members to receive timely information and risk communication, the UCS is the chief liaison between the municipalities of the North Country Public Health Region and the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). The UCS is working to ensure that guidance and directives provided at the Federal and State level reach local officials.

The UCS helps to identify process and emergent needs for response by initiating and maintaining contact with healthcare facilities and agencies. Under its Operations Section, the UCS assisted in the planning and setup of additional beds and resources with the five local hospitals, including Androscoggin Valley Hospital (AVH), Upper Connecticut Valley Hospital (UCVH), Weeks Medical Center, Littleton Regional Healthcare (LRH), and Cottage Hospital.

The UCS is also working with local organizations in order to address needs for personal protective equipment (PPE) to protect their at-risk employees and volunteers. Healthcare facilities, EMS agencies, law enforcement, and municipalities without access to WebEOC— the online crisis-management platform used to submit PPE requests to the



State of NH— are encouraged to contact the UCS for assistance by emailing:
COVID19@NCHCNH.org.

Volunteer recruitment and management also falls under the Unified Command Structure. Community members and partners interested in volunteering for COVID-19 response efforts in the region can learn more about available medical and non-medical opportunities with the Northern NH Medical Reserve Corps by contacting:
COVID19@NCHCNH.org

The North Country Health Consortium (NCHC) is a non-profit public health organization based in Littleton that collaborates with health and human services providers serving northern New Hampshire. To stay up to date with the latest information and recommendations for NH regarding COVID-19 visit: NCHCNH.org and click on the 'News' tab, and NCHC's Facebook page: [NorthCountryHCNH](https://www.facebook.com/NorthCountryHCNH). Please direct any questions regarding the regional response to COVID-19 to the Northern NH RPHN Public Information Officer: ashum@NCHCNH.org.

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