Representatives from throughout Upshur County met today to continue collaborative planning for Upshur County’s COVID-19 response. Today’s meeting was the latest in a series of strategy-setting discussions at the request of the Upshur-Buckhannon Health Department. The purpose of the meeting was to organize response objectives and to share status and resource information.

The Upshur-Buckhannon Health Department, St. Joseph’s Hospital, Community Care of WV, Upshur County Commission, City of Buckhannon, Upshur County Schools, West Virginia Wesleyan College, as well as numerous other medical providers, emergency responder, and social services agencies participated.

Though Upshur County currently does not have a positive-confirmed case of COVID-19, local agencies want residents to be sure that response considerations are underway. Medical providers in the county are seeing patients and testing cases if patients meet prescribed criteria. Partners are working together to ensure the availability of personal protective equipment, and to obtain additional equipment through official channels. Emergency responders are monitoring staffing plans and working with dispatchers to pre-screen calls to ensure awareness. Essential service providers are working with this group to ensure sound and consistent decision-making with partner agencies.

Public health and medical providers continue to stress the importance of good hand hygiene with soap and water for 20 seconds, or with alcohol-based hand sanitizers that contain at least 60% alcohol. St. Joseph’s Hospital’s provider clinics remain open, and the emergency department is operating and seeing patients as usual. St. Joseph’s has set-up a triage tent outside of the hospital to screen patients upon entry. The Triage Nurse’s Line at 304-473-2161 is active from 7:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. for community questions.

St. Joseph’s has implemented a no visitation policy with two exceptions. OB patients may have one visitor for their entire visit, and the hospital will work with end-of-life patients regarding visitation.

Similarly, Community Care of West Virginia offers both asymptomatic and symptomatic sites, and Main Street Buckhannon and Tri-County Health Center are the preferred sites for those not exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms. For those with symptoms, the Care Express location in the North Ridge Plaza near Buffalo Wild Wings and a separate section at the Tri-County Health Center are the preferred locations. Community Care is also triaging patients by phone and on-site at its sites. CCWV encourages Telehealth visits and its mail-order pharmacy service to support social distancing measures and keep patients in their homes. Additionally, Community Care pharmacies can offer curbside pick-up.

Community Care has implemented an outreach team to check on at-risk populations, and it maintains its pandemic triage line from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, at 304-471-2240.

The Upshur-Buckhannon Health Department continues to follow CDC guidelines and shares information from the CDC and WVDHHR with local partners regularly. The health department has received and distributed personal protective equipment as received from state authorities. The Upshur County Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management is also supporting personal protective equipment resource requests from local agencies, in particular first responders.
The local governments in Upshur County have enacted similar measures designed to support social distancing measures and to ensure remote access to services by residents. Both the Upshur County Commission and the City of Buckhannon encourage residents to visit their websites for details as well as watch for updates through local media channels. The City of Buckhannon has dedicated a web page to the COVID-19 response at buckhannonwv.org/covid-19. The county’s and city’s essential services remain operational.

To support ongoing information sharing between local agencies and to ensure access to the latest developments disseminated by state and national authorities, the Upshur-Buckhannon Health Department participates in daily briefings with its local health association and other public health entities from around the state. Further, the Upshur County Emergency Operations Center is currently activated to “Level 4,” which ensures constant countywide situational awareness between all agencies.

The COVID-19 pandemic response is a fluid situation. Partners will continue meeting regularly.

Importantly, local authorities would like to remind residents to obtain information from trusted, validated sources. Residents are encouraged to visit the CDC and WVDHHR websites for updated information about the COVID-19 virus. Partner agencies such as St. Joseph’s Hospital, Upshur-Buckhannon Health Department, Upshur County Schools, the City of Buckhannon, and Upshur County Commission will also continue to release details specific to their programs and operations through various local media outlets.