

Fire Chief speaks about coronavirus preparation

Written by By Cody Begaye Sun Correspondent
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Planning combined effort to combat virus

As COVID-19, also known as coronavirus, spreads throughout the United States, people have begun taking drastic measures, stocking up on cleaning and wellness supplies and going into quarantine from work or school.

McKinley County Fire Chief Jesus Morales attended the Gallup City Council's March 10 meeting to discuss plans to prepare for the virus reaching McKinley County.

Morales had attended an emergency planning meeting earlier between numerous local medical office personnel and employers. This meeting was closed off to the media, so the *Sun* was not allowed entry.

"There was a lot of discussion," Morales said. "There were several things I did take away, one being public information and education."

This means telling people about prevention, or how to prevent themselves from contracting the virus, Morales said. He added sneezing and coughing are common ways for a virus to spread.

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Morales said the second point of the meeting was logistics, where a lot of local agencies are coming together to plan a combined effort to combat the virus when it does arrive in New Mexico.

Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham confirmed the first presumptive positive cases in New Mexico early March 11.

“It was good to see this is one of the biggest Emergency Planning Committee meetings I’ve been to,” Morales said. “We usually have 4 or 5 members there, but today we had 50-plus. This was all agencies, stakeholders from hospitals, UNM-Gallup, the city police department, and the Navajo Nation. Everyone who would be involved in the community was there, sharing ideas and information.”

Morales wanted to assure the council and meeting attendees plans are in place.

“Our hospitals are ready,” Morales said. “They are screening people as we speak.”

Morales said there are two 24/7 phone numbers available for people to call if they have questions about the coronavirus, and to determine if they should be screened.

The two numbers are (505) 726-5897 and (505) 726-5888.

“If people are feeling sick, they are encouraged to stay home unless they have complications,” Morales said.

Mayor Jackie McKinney said the governor held a conference call for all city mayors across New Mexico on March 9.

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“They’re on top of it out there,” McKinney said. “I think we’re prepared to take care of our community.”

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