

Eddy County resident who recovered from COVID-19 shares his story

by Amy Wobbema

When Eric Myhre said goodbye to his family and left his farm south of Sheyenne on Sunday, March 8, coronavirus was the farthest thing from his mind. Now that he's been recorded as the first confirmed case among Eddy County residents – and has returned to the area for the first time in 20 days – he agreed to share his story with the "Transcript" to offer a recovered person's perspective on this novel virus that has captured the world's attention.

March 9
When Myhre boarded his flight to Kazakhstan on Monday, March 9, Kazakhstan had zero reported cases. The country, which is 12 hours ahead of New Rockford timewise, borders Russia. Eric takes several trips a year overseas, but this was his first to Kazakhstan. This particular trip was taken in partnership with the U.S. Commercial Service, the trade promotion arm of the U.S. Department of Commerce's International Trade Administration. They planned to be in the country through March 18.

He and his two colleagues deplaned in Germany, where they caught a connecting flight to Astana, Kazakhstan. Even though Germany's health minister told DW AKADEMIE that his country was facing a "coronavirus epidemic" as early as Feb. 26, Eric said there wasn't much talk about the virus when they flew through Germany.

March 11
The World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a global pandemic. In Kazakhstan, Eric and his colleagues received reports that President Donald Trump intended to impose a ban on travel from many European countries, including Germany, due to the COVID-19 outbreak. Upon this notification, they discussed when and how they should attempt to return to the U.S.

March 12
Trump's 30-day European travel restrictions officially went into place at midnight, however U.S. citizens and permanent residents (green card holders) were exempt from the order.

March 13
The first four cases of COVID-19 were recorded in Kazakhstan, unbeknownst to Myhre. President Trump declared a national emergency due to the COVID-19 pandemic. He ordered every state to set up emergency operation centers and asked hospitals to activate emergency preparedness plans.

March 14
Myhre and his colleagues left Astana, Kazakhstan four days earlier than they planned. Due to the travel restrictions in place, they were rerouted first to Warsaw, Poland and then on to Heathrow Airport in London, England. They stayed overnight in London that evening.

March 15
The trio returned to Heathrow Airport to fly into Minneapolis. However, they were restricted from flying into Minneapolis due to their travel history. Myhre said he stood in a line of about 100 people to get rerouted to John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York.

When they arrived in New York, it took about 1 1/2 hours to get through security. Then they entered a room staffed by CDC officials for a screening, again due to their travel history. They were asked several questions about where they had traveled and when, and their temperature was recorded. Myhre said they gave him directives to wash his hands, social distance and take his temperature twice daily for 14 days. He referred to it as an "advisement", not a requirement, to go home and self-quarantine for 14 days. That night, he stayed in a hotel near the airport. Meanwhile, at home, Gov.



Burgum signed an executive order closing N.D. school buildings to public access for five days.

March 16
On Monday morning, he boarded his flight to Fargo, with a connection in Minneapolis. "It was a really hard day for me and for Sara," he recalled. Since the CDC officials had told him to go home and quarantine, he was ready to come back to Eddy County. However, Sara told him he shouldn't come back to the farm, because then she and their children would also need to self-quarantine. As manager of the local volunteer ambulance squad, she felt that she needed to be available to take calls. Having her sidelined would be a big loss to the crew, as other volunteers had excluded themselves from responding to calls for other important reasons, such as age or pre-existing conditions.

At this time, Eric had no symptoms, but felt a bit of a head cold. He said it didn't even cross his mind that he had COVID-19. Rather, he thought it was likely just due to jet lag, or travel fatigue. "It was really hard to be told you can't come home," Eric reflected.

After several phone calls back and forth, the pair decided to have Eric quarantine at their family's lake home in Minnesota, for the safety of them, their family and the entire community. Neighbors and family members who lived in the area brought him food and supplies into the garage, so he didn't leave the house. He used FaceTime to communicate with family daily.

March 18
Since he had already been apart from his family for 10 days, Eric was eager to come home. "What can I do to get back home?" he asked his wife over the phone.

"If you want to come home, get tested," Sara replied. He was reluctant to "waste a test", he felt, because he still didn't really have any symptoms such as fever, cough or shortness of breath. He had been taking his temperature twice daily as advised and was tracking it through a phone app.

He decided to schedule an e-visit with Sanford Health to get a professional opinion. He explained his chest cold/fatigue and his travel overseas and was given a test order due to his travel history. He then called the local hospital in the Minnesota town where he was staying to schedule a test, and he was denied due to lack of symptoms, despite his travel history.

March 19
The next morning he called Sanford, and they scheduled a drive-thru test in Fargo that day at 2:30 p.m. He drove into Fargo, stayed in his vehicle while the test was administered, and drove straight back to the lake home to "wait it out." He was told at the time he would have results in 3-5 days. He said that every day thereafter, a Sanford nurse specialized in COVID-19 would call to

check his symptoms and ask how he was doing.

March 20
He noted that his chest cold started to get worse. That night around 6 p.m., he recorded a low grade fever of 99.1 F and chills.

March 21
Eric woke up feeling warm, and recorded a fever of 100.9 F.

March 22
His fever had broken by the time he woke up on March 22, and he said he hasn't had one since. He took a call from Sanford Hospital, and he was notified that they had outsourced his test to Quest Laboratory in California, so the results weren't expected for another 3-5 days. He also documented a lack of taste and smell, one of the less common symptoms of COVID-19.

March 26
During his call with the Sanford nurse, he was told, "We suspect you have COVID-19, but we do not have a positive test." The nurse then explained the CDC guidelines for when it is safe for a person to be released from quarantine:

- No fever for at least 72 hours (that is three full days of no fever) AND
- Other symptoms have improved (for example, when a person's cough or shortness of breath have improved) AND
- At least 7 days have passed since the individual's symptoms first appeared

She deduced that he was safe to be released from quarantine on that day because he had gone in for a test on March 19 (7 days prior) and his fever had subsided four days prior, on March 22, and not returned. Further, his condition had improved.

March 27
Eric called his local family doctor, and he was advised to stay in quarantine a couple more days for precautionary purposes. He was prescribed azithromycin in case it was a bacterial infection and not COVID-19, because the test results still had not come back.

May 29
In consultation with Sanford COVID-19 nurses, he returned to the farm on Sunday, March 29.

April 1
Eric received a call from the Sanford nurse. She informed him that his test had come back negative for coronavirus.

April 2
Apparently the call was a bad 'April Fools' Joke, because he was contacted the following day and told his test was actually positive. Quest Laboratory had notified Sanford that they had detected a computer glitch and corrected the error to note the positive result.

Eric was then contacted by NDDoH epidemiologist Jennifer Schmidt. She asked him to recount his travel history for the past 30 days, explain his symptoms and note with whom he was in close contact.

Sara recalled that the ep-

idemiologist stated, "You should be proud of yourself, because you took this as seriously as we ask people to do."

After Schmidt reviewed his case and the information he provided, she issued a letter that stated, "Your period of monitoring and social distancing (ended) on March 26, 2020. It is permissible to return to work."

He recently learned that the two colleagues he traveled with also self-isolated for two weeks. Neither experienced any symptoms, and neither were tested. Therefore, at this point it has not been confirmed whether they were infected with the virus or not.

Eric said he hopes that the main thing we all take away from this experience is that it's important to stay home when sick. "This isn't just about coronavirus," he said. "If you are sick, stay home. It doesn't matter if it's influenza or pneumonia or a cold."

It's also important to put facts over fear, he noted, referencing Gov. Burgum's daily addresses to state residents. Even though he was among those who had very minor symptoms, he still followed the directives from hospital staff, ND-DoH and the CDC to ensure that he wouldn't spread the disease to others. And he did all this before he even knew the result of the test.

Those directives include washing your hands often; not touching your eyes, nose and mouth; keeping a safe distance from others (at least 6 ft away); disinfecting surfaces daily and staying home as much as possible. All residents should heed this advice, not just those with symptoms.

Most importantly, he avoided physical contact with others. "This is serious. Use the recommended precautions issued by the CDC. If you or someone in your household is sick, everyone in the household should self-isolate for 14 days," Myhre advised.

Residents should know that this individual case poses no risk of community spread within Eddy County. Eric was among 14 positive cases recorded in the state on Friday, and his was determined to be due to travel. Simultaneously, he was also included in the total of 55 recovered individuals reported by the NDDoH. Community members should not fear that they could be infected by him.

Community Calendar

CURRENT NOTICES

GREAT PLAINS FOOD BANK will be in Carrington on Friday, April 17, at Grace Lutheran Church (95 First St SW) from 10 -11 a.m.

MONTHLY EVENTS

Many regularly scheduled meetings and gatherings have been cancelled due to COVID-19 restrictions. We will post updates here as they come in, and will also post online on our website: www.newrockfordtranscript.com.

READERS STAY SAFE!

Lake Region District Health stresses "calm and caution" after first case reported in Eddy County

LRDHU-Eddy County is encouraging calm and caution following the announcement of the first positive COVID-19 case in Eddy County.

The North Dakota Department of Health released information that included a positive COVID-19 case on April 3 in Eddy County. With fast-changing circumstances and data updates, today North Dakota has 173 confirmed cases of COVID-19. Statewide 5,798 ND residents have been tested with 5,625 negative results. 55 have been hospitalized.

"We want to reassure the community, we are trying to stem the spread of COVID-19," said Danelle Schmid, RN. "We continue to encourage people to practice social distancing to keep everyone safe. We are hopeful our communities and our state will prove to be only a small sample of the overall COVID-19 situation."

Now, more than ever, it is critical to take preventative action for your health, and the health of the community:

- Wash your hands frequently with soap for at least 20 seconds. In the absence of soap, use a hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol content.
- Avoid touching your T-Zone (eyes, nose and mouth).
- Practice social distancing. Avoid social gatherings. Use drive-through, pickup or delivery options.
- Work from home when possible.
- Stay home when you are sick. Call your health-care provider if you develop fever, cough or

shortness of breath.

- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash and wash your hands. In the absence of a tissue, cough or sneeze into your elbow.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.
- Stay away from individuals who are sick. Limit close contact (six feet or more) with others as much as possible.

"We do want to stress to everyone that the COVID-19 pandemic is constantly evolving," said Schmid. "This means people should also take the time to go the CDC and North Dakota Department of Health websites and get familiar with their information. They have provided guidance for a variety of specific groups, as well as for general population methods of response."

For ongoing response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the North Dakota Department of Health has established a COVID-19 hotline to help answer questions. You can call (866) 207-2880 from 7 a.m.-10 p.m., 7 days a week. Individuals who need medical advice should contact their health care provider.

For more information, visit <https://www.health.nd.gov/diseases-conditions/coronavirus>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

Or for more localized posts visit: <https://www.facebook.com/LRDHU/>

Northern Plains Electric Cooperative announces Operation Round Up

The Northern Plains Electric Operation Round Up board of directors met in March to approve grants totaling \$9,100 to help support worthy causes.

These charitable grants are made possible through the generosity of Northern Plains Electric Cooperative members who voluntarily elect to have their electric bills rounded up to the next dollar. The donated amount averages about 50 cents a month for each participating member, and raises approximately \$37,000 each year.

Since the program's beginning in October 1998, grants totaling \$796,562 have been awarded to 1095 local charitable causes.

- Grants approved in March include:
- Sheyenne Fire Department, building addition.
 - American Legion, LaBrash Altringer Post 236, Wimbledon, remodel building/make ADA accessible.
 - Heart of America Germans from Russia, Rugby, purchase units for historic displays.
 - Women's Auxiliary Cemetery Association, New Rockford, storm repair.
 - Tara Jones, McHenry, medical.
 - Sylvia Martin, Pettibone, medical.
 - Wanda Grant, Belcourt, medical.
 - Brilee Mack, Rugby, medical.
 - Sharon Neidert, Cando, medical.

ence in the lives of people right here in our region.

The Operation Round Up board meets every quarter to disburse funds to worthy individuals and organizations. The board will meet again in June to review applications. Application deadline is May 20.

If you would like additional information about this worthy program, please contact Northern Plains Electric Cooperative by calling (800) 882-2500; or, you may obtain guidelines or download applications at www.nplains.com.

Veterans Service Officer provides V.A. updates

Each and every day we are faced with changes related to COVID-19. Please refer to the Fargo VA webpage for the most up to day information: <https://www.fargo.va.gov>.

As of March 19, 2020, a COVID-19 call center is up and running. It is open 7 days a week from 9 a.m.-3 p.m. with nurses available to answer questions.

The VA medical center is adding more beds in preparation for COVID-19 patients.

Appointments are being kept at the clinic, but be sure to call first before arriving. If a visitor needs assistance, one visitor will be allowed access to help the vet.

Visitors to the VA facilities will undergo a screening

process to determine possible exposure or the presence of symptoms. If there are any concerns, visitors will not be allowed.

The Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOC) are seeing only urgent/emergency patients at this time using video or telephone communication.