



Ashe County

Adam Stumb, County Manager
150 Government Cir, Suite 2400
Jefferson, NC 28640

April 6, 2020

Release of Identifying Information about COVID-19 Patients

Jefferson, NC – On Friday, April 3rd, 2020, our regional health department, AppHealthCare, notified the public that an Ashe County resident had tested positive for COVID-19 (novel coronavirus). This was the first positive case of the virus in Ashe County. Due to Federal HIPAA privacy regulations, identifying details about the patient were not released by AppHealthCare to the public, to the media or even to Ashe County Government.

Since last Friday's notification, our offices have received numerous calls and emails asking that Ashe County release detailed information about this patient. While we recognize that the community has concerns about what having our first positive case will mean going forward, we need to be clear on two things:

- 1) Ashe County Government was not given the name and specific location of the patient.**
- 2) Due to patient privacy laws, Ashe County Government could not legally release that identifying information to the public even if we had it.**

The 1996 Federal Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) prohibits health care providers and government officials from reporting to the media, or the public at large, identifiable details about a specific patient. AppHealthCare and Ashe County are bound by, and respect, HIPAA's privacy protections for patients. These important protections are not suspended during a pandemic. While they cannot provide identifying details to the public, AppHealthCare will continue to investigate any positive cases and trace for close contacts that are deemed to be at higher risk for exposure following CDC and NC DHHS guidance.

Like many in the community, we here at Ashe County Government have, of course, heard the many rumors and read all of the speculation on social media about the identity of this first positive case. As mentioned above, Ashe County was, correctly, never given the identity of the positive case and will not speculate as to who the positive case is or how they may have become ill. We respectfully ask that the community do the same. Like AppHealthCare, our focus is on keeping Ashe County safe and healthy while respecting the privacy and rights of our residents.

#####