

Generosity Gone Viral: Donations of Supplies, Food to UC San Diego Health Boost Fight Against Coronavirus

Even as the coronavirus pandemic has mushroomed throughout communities, so too have the offers of support and resources.

Eleven days ago, UC San Diego Health officially launched a donation program, asking local research institutions, companies, organizations and individuals to help alleviate widespread shortages of key materials. Among them: personal protective equipment (PPE) used by doctors, nurses and staff in hospitals treating patients with COVID-19, the respiratory disease caused by the novel coronavirus.

The call-to-donation effort does not reflect an immediate need or crisis. UC San Diego Health officials say current supplies of PPE are sufficient to meet current demand, but the depth and breadth of the outbreak continues to unfold. The curve is not yet flat, and health systems across the country are grappling with uncertain supply chains that could leave them short of or without critical materials when infection rates and hospital admissions spike.

“This is about being prepared both now and weeks from now,” said Patty Maysent, CEO of UC San Diego Health. “The situation will likely get worse before it gets better, and the actions we take now will pay off later when the need is greatest.”

The donation response has been overwhelming, said Braden Ouellet, director of supply chain management services for UC San Diego Health. “It’s been incredibly heartening to see how others have stepped up to help us provide the best possible and safest environment for our patients and staff.”

On the front lines



Shannon Needoba, assistant director of Supply Chain Management at UC San Diego Health, inspects a shipment of donated masks.

For doctors, nurses and others working in the most highly impacted parts of the health system, PPE represents the literal physical barrier between them and infection by the novel coronavirus, which is spread through droplets and contaminated surfaces. High on the wish list of greater supply are:

- Medical-grade procedure and surgical masks only. (The health system is not able to accept hand-sewn masks.)
- N95 respirators—only 3M branded models 1870+ or 8210
- Surgical and isolation/protective gowns
- Arm sleeves
- Goggles, safety glasses and face shields



Michael Prendez, a senior nursing aide, moving boxes of donated face masks into Jacobs Medical Center.

Ouellet said there has been a remarkable inpouring of these materials and more. Multiple campus-based labs, now closed, have contributed pallets of unneeded equipment. Ra Medical Systems, Inc., a medical device manufacturer in Carlsbad, donated 24,000 surgical masks. The San Diego Unified School District donated 3,000 N95 respirators. Smaller individual contributions flow in daily through the mail. Ouellet and his team are working furiously to process and distribute the donations where they are most needed.

“It’s been pretty incredible,” he said. “There’s a constant sense of inspiration. Nothing goes unnoticed or unappreciated. What’s happening touches us all and it’s bringing us together, even as we try to maintain our social distance.”

The eaten path

A second component of the donation effort has been an appeal for food and supplies to support frontline health workers, from nurses and technicians to housekeepers and custodians who keep the hospitals clean and safe.

In some ways, it’s an effort that began from the outside-in, with donations first appearing unsolicited at university medical centers in the form of pizzas, Dunkin’ Donut gift cards and hundreds of lunches and dinners from Phil’s BBQ, partnering with the San Diego Padres.

Courtney Johnson, director of Patient Engagement and Experience Strategy at UC San Diego Health, is tasked with organizing and managing the “incredible outpouring of generosity” from restaurants, companies and individuals.



Doctors and nurses take time out to enjoy donated sandwiches from Phil's BBQ and the San Diego Padres.

“We’ve implemented a process to coordinate food donations and how they are distributed, to make sure we spread gratitude and share recognition across the organization,” Johnson said. “We ask that people contact us first, tell us what they would like to donate and in what quantity. In terms of food, we’re looking for packaged meals, like those from restaurants, or foods that are individually wrapped, like the donation of 8,000 protein bars we just received from Power Crunch.”

Johnson’s team is also accepting non-perishable food and household items for UC San Diego

Health employees in need of essential items. “We’ve just begun an effort to create ‘resource boxes’ of food and things like cleaning supplies to share with them.”

All such donated items, Johnson said, must be new and sealed. Homemade items cannot be accepted.

Johnson said it’s not just food or household goods that are welcome. She has received inquiries from stores and vendors about donations of wellness products, such as calming teas, lavender hand creams, soaps and bath balms. These too will be distributed equitably as they come in.

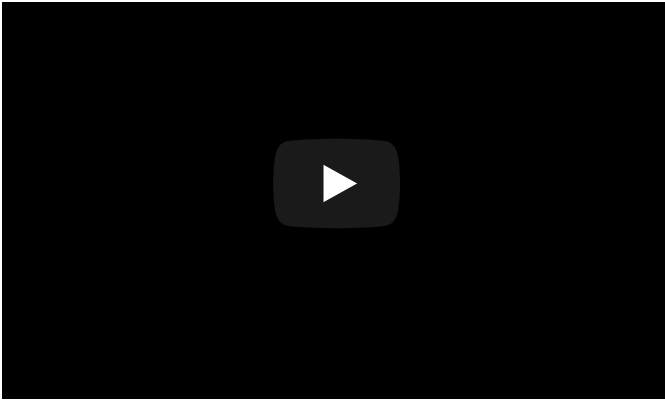
“Our team members love it,” said Johnson. “It puts smiles on their faces. It’s just so awesome.”

No stone unearned

For the Fitzpatrick family, the current coronavirus crisis recalled memories of a year ago when an uncle fell ill. The Fitzpatrick children—Keva, age 6; Nora, age 6 and Kearan, age 9—wanted to send their thoughts and wishes not only to their uncle but his health care providers as well.

So they created “feel good rocks,” small stones painted in a rainbow of colors and adorned with hearts and words of thanks. “LOVE” was mentioned a lot. The current pandemic has again prompted the Fitzpatrick clan to send out messages of support and warm wishes to health care providers.





The family has produced more than 150 decorated rocks, which they have donated to the UC San Diego Health. Some of the rocks will be placed along pathways used by hospital staff heading into the medical center in Hillcrest; others will be distributed by the Office of Experience Transformation at Hillcrest and in La Jolla.

The Office of Experience Transformation invites community expressions of gratitude to frontline health care workers in the form of letters, cards, notes and drawings. Johnson said they will be shared, with collages and posters displayed in break rooms and hospital entrances.

Donated items can be mailed to:

UC San Diego Health
Office of Experience Transformation
200 West Arbor Drive #8916
San Diego, CA 92103

Or scanned and emailed to experiencetransformation@ucsd.edu.

Want to donate?

UC San Diego Health is in particular need of specific items, most notably personal protective equipment, such as medical-grade masks, N95 respirators, protective gowns, arm sleeves, safety glasses and face shields.

It is also accepting food and other items for caregivers and cash donations, which will allow health system officials to respond more quickly to emergent needs.

Donations can be mailed or dropped off, and a tax deduction form is available. For more details, visit [UC San Diego Health's Coronavirus Information webpage](#).

Keep up with campus news by subscribing to *This Week @ UC San Diego*