

The Telegraph

Local nonprofit assisting medical personnel



NASHUA – MakeIt Labs has taken it upon themselves to assist local health care workers by testing and crafting protective gear as they work on the front lines to help battle the COVID-19 outbreak.

President of the nonprofit makerspace, Bill Schongar, said MakeIt Labs is working directly with Southern New Hampshire Medical Center and other organizations to get testing done on face shields that are used to protect

medical personnel when dealing with patients. While there is no shortage of supplies just yet at SNHMC, officials are preparing for what could become a shortage if projections hold true, and an increased number of patients come in requiring care.

“We’re preparing, but we’re not experiencing shortages currently,” said Suzanne Tammaro, a spokesperson for SNHMC.

“Everything that we’re doing right now is to mitigate the risk of a shortage,” Tammaro added.

She said if projections hold true, and the hospital starts seeing a lot of patients who are in need of care, then yes, they will experience a shortage. The face shields being tested at the hospital will help determine if they can be properly sterilized. The masks are not being used with patients at the moment, Tammaro said.

MakeIt Labs, along with other makerspaces across New England, are using laser cutters to create face shields, which go over facemasks and protect them from any sort of airborne droplets. As far as the masks themselves go, MakeIt Labs is trying to get more materials to crafters so they have access to safe materials they can use. MakeIt Labs is more so involved with trying to validate those designs, with their main effort being the face shields.

“On our end, what we’re doing is here in the shop, we are making face shields and we’re gonna be distributing these, but we’re also testing the face shields,” Schongar said.

He said the design used is not their own, rather it is developed by the University of Wisconsin and a group called Delve Engineering. MakeIt Labs took these to SNHMC and ran sterilization tests and got feedback from senior staff as far as what can be changed and needs to be done differently. They have not yet been distributed and used among patients, as they are more involved in trying to validate the design.

MakeIt Labs focus is twofold: They are vetting the open source designs with medical professionals and helping get local production of face shields going as fast as possible.

Moreover, Tammaro said she believes the hospital still is seeing the same number of people who need emergency care, citing that people still are having babies and heart attacks, for example. Nonetheless, with COVID-19 adding another obstacle for medical personnel, Tammaro said the hospital, like other organizations, are looking at increasing in-patient bed capacity and intensive care unit beds.

She also gave kudos to MakeIt Labs for reaching out to them last week with the initiative.

“The response from the community has been amazing,” Tammaro said.

This initiative began last week on Thursday and Friday, and Schongar said what they are encouraging others to do is to look online to see if there is another group already helping in this capacity, and to consolidate efforts, rather than start a new one.

“It’s like drinking from a fire hose,” Schongar said of how things have gone so far. *“There is a lot of information out there. There’s thousands and thousands of volunteers all over the nation trying to get this stuff done. The problem is that there’s not a lot of direction, and there’s overlapping efforts.”*

As MakeIt Labs tests alternative materials, they are publishing their findings back to a centralized group that is then being distributed across the country. Schongar said a big thing with these efforts is they are not trying to replace production capacity, rather they are trying to hold off the need until production capacities ramp up. However, a big hurdle they are trying to overcome is securing the materials, such as PET plastic, which the shield itself is made out of.

“Anyone that knows PET film manufacturers, bottling companies, definitely should talk to us, because we need their help,” Schongar said.

Another material they are in need of is foam.

Schongar said some of the face shields they made are being tested at Massachusetts General Hospital. They already have run through testing at

SNHMC. Schonga said as soon as they get the needed materials, they can produce 1,000 face shields a day between MakeIt Labs and other local volunteer efforts.

“It’s just nice to feel like we can actually make a difference, because normally we make things for the fun of it. Here, we’re making things to save lives, and with all the health care workers putting their lives on the line, this is the very least we can do, is to try and find a way to help them,” Schongar said.

Adam Urquhart may be contacted at 594-1206, or at aurquhart@nashuatelegraph.com.

EDITOR’S NOTE: This content is being provided for free as a public service to our community during the coronavirus outbreak. Please support local journalism by subscribing to The Telegraph at [https://home.nashuatelegraph.com/clickshare/checkDelivery.do;jsessionid=.](https://home.nashuatelegraph.com/clickshare/checkDelivery.do;jsessionid=)

NEWSLETTER

Today's breaking news and more in your inbox

Interests

The Telegraph Daily Newsletter

SUBSCRIBE

