

The hardest part for Susy is missing her Nurse-Family Partnership® (NFP) moms and their babies.

The NFP nurse in the Tri-Cities area of Washington state has been deployed by the Benton-Franklin Health District to help with the campaign to control the COVID-19 outbreak.

Since March, she and other NFP nurses at Benton-Franklin Health District have been working on both contact tracing and telehealth visits with their NFP moms. In-person home visits have been suspended due to the pandemic.

“We’re in the office every day doing epidemiological work,” said Susy, who is one of the Spanish-speaking nurses on the staff. “We pull the files on new positive cases and call them. We ask about symptoms and request they isolate per CDC guidelines. Then, we call their close contacts to notify them that they are at risk, ask about any symptoms and request that they quarantine for 14 days.”



NFP nurse Susy has been deployed to do COVID-19 contact tracing, in addition to serving her NFP clients.

“““

I JUST KEEP TELLING THEM WHAT GOOD MOMS THEY ARE STAYING HOME AND STAYING SAFE. I'M SO PROUD OF THEM.

At the same time, Susy is receiving texts and phone calls from the 19 moms on her NFP client list.

“In between calls for contact tracing, I serve my NFP moms,” she said. “It’s quite a challenge. I’m juggling the best I can.”

Fortunately, she hasn’t had any urgent cases among her new moms – “Thank you, God,” she said. “But I do have new babies I’ve never laid eyes on, and that really bothers me.”

As with all new mothers, Susy’s clients have lots of questions.

One of the moms could not get her baby to latch onto the breast. “The baby was one month old,” Susy said.

The mom was able to use a breast pump that Susy had provided for her before the stay-at-home order was issued, so the baby has remained exclusively breast fed and is doing well.

The moms send Susy pictures of their babies, so she gets to see their little faces and she looks closely at them to evaluate how they are doing.

“I have one little guy who I was really concerned about before this whole pandemic started,” she said. “He was not gaining weight and his behaviors were a little off.

“When we were told we couldn’t have in person visits, I left a scale there so the mom could weigh him on a weekly basis, and she would send me videos of his progress and his interactions with others. Now he’s gaining weight and doing well. It makes my heart so happy,” Susy said. “I miss my people and they say they miss me, too.”

In addition to the usual questions about infant care and development, Susy is fielding a blizzard of questions from her NFP clients about COVID-19.

“The biggest one is ‘Can I get this again if I’ve already had it,’ ” she said. “I have to tell them that I don’t know the answer.”

Susy’s phone buzzes with calls and texts from 5 a.m. until 10 or 11 p.m., but she has established a firm limit to ensure she gets some sleep and protects herself from burnout.

“I’ve incorporated some self-care into my schedule,” she said. “Except for emergencies, after 8 p.m. I don’t answer anything until morning.”

The Tri-Cities region has experienced a high number of coronavirus cases. An outbreak at a nearby meat-processing plant created a lot of anxiety. “People were complaining that workers were not being protected,” Susy said.

A self-described “people-person,” she said she really enjoys contacting people “and the more empathetic I am, the more information I get from them. I tell them I just want to know how they’re doing, and I ask them open-ended questions, so they have an opportunity to feel heard.”

When she would call people to inform them that their COVID test had come back positive, many would thank her for calling. And when she would ask them how they were doing, they thanked her for listening. “These people just need to feel heard and giving people the opportunity to feel heard is very, very satisfying,” Susy said. “

She reminds her Nurse-Family Partnership clients the end is not yet in sight.

“The good news is that, based on what these new moms are telling me, they feel supported. They know they can ask us anything and get an accurate answer,” she said. “There are a lot of questions about the pandemic, and if I don’t know the answer, I tell them I’ll find it and get back to them.”

As the agricultural seasons have begun in earnest across the state, more essential workers are in the fields and orchards, and the risks of new hotspots are increasing.

Many local residents also have related that they are taking part in social gatherings, holding sports practice sessions and not wearing face coverings in spite of state and local directives.

Case counts and hospitalization rates continue to increase in Benton and Franklin counties, which means the public health effort to stop the virus likely will continue.

“All of the NFP moms have the same questions: ‘When will this end?’ ‘When will we have home visits again?’

“I just keep telling them what good moms they are staying home and staying safe,” she said. “I’m so proud of them.”



Throughout the pandemic, nurse Susy continues to support NFP moms – answering their questions and helping them stay safe and healthy.