

In the face of a pandemic, there's no time to waste. That sense of urgency drove leaders and staff at Riverside Healthcare to execute an innovative, large-scale overhaul of several patient rooms. Within 48 hours, the health system added several negative pressure rooms in anticipation of COVID-19.

Jon Overacker, system director of facilities and engineering, led the transformation. He saw it as a proactive way of readying the health system for an influx of patients. Negative pressure rooms are a valuable asset in the fight against COVID-19. These rooms push air outside instead of recirculating it inside, resulting in fewer airborne pathogens.

For enhanced safety, the process accounts for the air sent outside too. HEPA filters catch organic materials as air flows outside.

Before the work, the Kankakee-based health system had one negative pressure room in the emergency department (ED) and a handful in the inpatient setting, as is standard. Now, negative pressure rooms are in:

- A 42-bed inpatient unit
- One inpatient pediatric room
- Seven more ED rooms, now totaling eight

In addition, the health system added negative pressure rooms to multiple wings in two Senior Life Communities—something rare in long-term care.

“By taking these steps, we are not only ensuring the safety of our patients and residents, but also the hardworking staff who are caring for them,” said Phil Kambic, Riverside Healthcare president and CEO, pictured above (right) with State Sen. Patrick Joyce.

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