

## Worcester County Health Department (WCHD)

### Preparedness activities for emerging infectious diseases such as the new Coronavirus (COVID-19)

#### Coronavirus (COVID-19) Disease and Risk

COVID-19 is a disease caused by a respiratory virus first identified in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China. This is a new virus that hasn't caused illness in humans before. COVID-19 is spread just like colds or flu through:

- coughing and sneezing, which creates respiratory droplets
- close personal contact, such as touching or shaking hands
- touching an object or surface with the virus on it

#### Symptoms of COVID-19 include

- Fever
- Coughing
- Shortness of breath
- In more severe cases, pneumonia (infection in the lungs)

#### Individual risk is dependent on exposure. Current risk assessment:

- For most of the American public, who are unlikely to be exposed to this virus at this time, the immediate health risk from COVID-19 is considered low.
- People in communities where ongoing community spread with the virus that causes COVID-19 has been reported are at elevated, though still relatively low risk of exposure.
- Healthcare workers caring for patients with COVID-19 are at elevated risk of exposure.
- Close contacts of persons with COVID-19 also are at elevated risk of exposure.
- Travelers returning from affected international locations where community spread is occurring also are at elevated risk of exposure. (list is updated regularly at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html>)

#### What You Can Do to Protect from Infectious Disease

- While the immediate risk of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) to most of the American public is believed to be low at this time, everyone can do their part to help us respond to this emerging public health threat:
- It's currently flu and respiratory disease season and CDC recommends getting a flu vaccine, taking everyday preventive actions to help stop the spread of germs, and taking flu antivirals if prescribed.
- **Preventing viral respiratory infections. Protect yourself from getting sick.**
  - wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds
  - use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60 percent alcohol if soap and water are not available.
  - avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands
  - avoid close contact with people who are sick
  - stay home while you are sick
  - avoid close contact with others
  - cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing
  - clean and disinfect objects and surfaces

- If you are a healthcare provider, be on the look-out for people who recently traveled from affected countries (list is updated regularly at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html>) and have fever and respiratory symptoms. Follow guidance provided to you by the health department. This guidance will be updated as needed.
- If you are a healthcare provider caring for a COVID-19 patient or a public health responder, please take care of yourself and follow recommended infection control procedures.
- If you have been in affected countries\*or have been exposed to someone sick with COVID-19 in the last 14 days, you will face some limitations on your movement and activity. Please follow instructions during this time. Your cooperation is integral to the ongoing public health response to try to slow the spread of this virus. If you develop COVID-19 symptoms, contact your healthcare provider, and tell them about your symptoms and your travel or exposure to a COVID-19 patient.
- For people who are ill with diagnosed COVID-19 or seasonal influenza, please follow CDC guidance on how to reduce the risk of spreading your illness to others.
- **There are currently no recommendations for the general population to wear face masks.**

### **Public Health Activities**

- WCHD has surveillance in place for all reportable diseases including new infections or suspected cases of COVID-19. Medical facilities know what to report, how to report and how to reach us. We have provided current guidance documents from the state health department related to COVID-19 to these facilities.
- WCHD has an on call service available for 24/7 response to public health needs.
- Systems are in place for rapid testing for any potential cases.
- Isolation and quarantine plans are in place if necessary.
- We have planning experience with pandemic flu preparation including the robust public health response to H1N1.
- Public health has access to additional resources that can include items needed for response such as medical masks and personal protective equipment (PPE) and other health care needs if a health emergency is declared and if the Strategic National Stockpile is requested.

### **What Businesses and Governments Can do to Prepare**

- We encourage businesses and governments to look at past pandemic flu planning and procedures to assure the plans are current, relevant and staff are aware. These plans can assist in the response to COVID-19 as the transmission is similar to the flu.
- Assure continuity of operations/government plans are up to date to keep critical services in place.
- Additional resources for businesses and employers to plan and respond to COVID-19 can be found at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/guidance-business-response.html>

**More Information on Coronavirus from the Centers for Disease Control**

(Source) <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

**More information on Coronavirus through the Maryland Department of Health**

(Source) <https://phpa.health.maryland.gov/Pages/Novel-coronavirus.aspx>

**Current Number of Cases in the US**

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/cases-in-us.html>