

January 28, 2020

Dear Community Partners:

I want to provide updated information on the respiratory illness outbreak that originated in Wuhan City, China, caused by a novel coronavirus (termed “2019-nCoV”). Wuhan is the capital of Hubei province in eastern China. Please note the current situation is quite fluid and information may change rapidly as new information is obtained from public health authorities (e.g. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), World Health Organization (WHO), etc.). Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that can cause disease ranging from the common cold to severe disease (e.g., Middle-East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS)).

Early on, many of the patients in the outbreak reportedly had some link to a large seafood and animal market, suggesting the virus may have emerged from an animal source. Analysis of the genetic tree of this virus is ongoing to understand its specific source and how easily or sustainably this virus is spreading between people. Current symptoms reported for patients with 2019-nCoV have included mild to severe respiratory illness with fever, cough, and difficulty breathing.

According to CDC, up to 4,500 confirmed cases in China have been identified, including approximately 100 deaths. Approximately 18 countries internationally have identified cases of the novel coronavirus, including the United States, where 5 travel-related cases have been identified in the states of Arizona, California, Illinois, and Washington. Virginia currently has no confirmed cases.

The CDC considers the current risk of 2019-nCoV infection to the American public to be low based on available information. For travelers to China, CDC has issued a Level 3 (Avoid Nonessential Travel) travel advisory, and this is being updated as more information becomes available. Please see <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/notices/warning/novel-coronavirus-wuhan-china> for more travel-related information. In the United States, public health entry screening is currently being conducted at New York (JFK), Los Angeles (LAX), and San Francisco (SFO), Atlanta (ATL) and Chicago (ORD). This will potentially expand to up to 20 United States airports in the near future.

Recommendations for the Public

- Based on current, available information, the risk of this new virus for the American public is considered low. More information is needed to better understand the risk and the virus itself.
- There are no special or separate public health recommendations for schools or government entities
- Currently, we are in influenza and respiratory disease season in Virginia and the US. There are certain steps that everyone should always take to prevent illness, including getting a flu vaccine, washing hands frequently, practicing cough hygiene, and staying home when sick.
- As noted above, CDC recommends avoiding all nonessential travel to China. Chinese officials have closed transport in and out of Wuhan, including buses, subways, trains, and the international airport.
- If a person who recently traveled to Wuhan feels sick, or had **direct** contact with a person known to have the novel coronavirus, the following are recommended:
 - Seek medical care right away. Before you go to a doctor’s office or emergency room, call ahead and tell the doctor about your recent travel and symptoms.
 - Avoid contact with others, except for seeking medical care

- Do not travel while ill
- Practice good cough and sneeze hygiene – cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve (not your hands) when coughing or sneezing.
- Practice good hand hygiene – wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.

It is not too late to get a flu vaccine. Please note that it is still flu season, and Virginia is currently at “widespread” geographic influenza activity. Influenza is currently a greater threat to the public than the novel coronavirus. In addition, other respiratory viruses circulate during this time of year.

For more information on this rapidly evolving situation, please visit the Virginia Department of Health Novel Coronavirus 2019 website at <http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/surveillance-and-investigation/novel-coronavirus/>. If you have questions, please contact the Rappahannock Area Health District at 540-899-4797 during normal business hours, or the VDH 24/7 answering service at 866-531-3068 during nights, weekends or holidays.

Thank you for your efforts to keep all residents of the Rappahannock Region safe and healthy.

Sincerely,

Brooke Rossheim, M.D., M.P.H.

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