

January 31, 2020

Dear Community Partners and RAHD staff:

The Rappahannock Area Health District is closely monitoring an outbreak of respiratory illness caused by a novel coronavirus (termed “2019-nCoV”). A novel coronavirus is a new coronavirus strain that has not been previously found in people. Symptoms have included fever, cough, and difficulty breathing. On January 21, 2020, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) announced the first confirmed case in the United States in a traveler returning from Wuhan, China.

The CDC considers the immediate risk of 2019-nCoV infection to the general American public low at this time. The vast majority of cases have occurred in China. A small number of cases have been confirmed in the United States, but 2019-nCoV is not spreading in the community.

Person-to-person spread of the virus is occurring in China. At this time, it’s unclear how easily or sustainably this virus is spreading between people. We also are unsure of how severe this new virus will be. The latest situation summary updates are available on the CDC's website at www.cdc.gov/coronavirus. The World Health Organization is posting daily updates on the global situation, including case counts, at <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/situation-reports>.

Public health agencies at the local, state, federal and global level are working hard to respond to this rapidly evolving situation. We are building on the work we do every day to prevent and control outbreaks. We have plans and systems in place from our work to prepare and respond to diseases that have emerged in the past, like SARS, H1N1 influenza, Zika virus and Ebola virus. We are working closely with our health care partners to quickly identify any potential cases and implement steps to reduce the risk of the disease spreading should the case be confirmed. The Virginia Department of Health has established a webpage, www.vdh.virginia.gov/coronavirus, to provide accurate information to the public. It includes the number of patients tested for 2019-nCoV in Virginia and the test results.

Recommendations for the Public

- Based on current, available information, the risk of this new coronavirus for the American public is considered low. More information is needed to understand the risk and the virus itself better.
- The CDC recommends that travelers avoid all nonessential travel to China (see <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/notices/warning/novel-coronavirus-china>). Chinese officials have closed transport in and out of Wuhan, including buses, subways, trains, and the international airport.

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- Currently, we are in influenza (“flu”) and respiratory disease season. Help reduce the spread by getting a flu vaccine if you have not already had one, washing your hands frequently, practicing cough hygiene, and staying home when sick.

If a person who traveled recently to the Hubei province of China feels sick, or had close-contact with a person confirmed or suspected to have the novel coronavirus, they should:

- Call their medical provider for care and tell them about their recent travel. Be sure to wear a mask when you arrive at the doctor’s office or emergency department.
- Avoid contact with others and don’t travel, except for seeking medical care
- 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.

Visit www.vdh.virginia.gov/coronavirus for more information. If you have further general questions about the coronavirus situation, please contact the Rappahannock Area Health District at 540-899-4797. If you have individual medical questions, please contact your healthcare provider.

Thank you for your efforts to keep everyone in the Rappahannock Area Health District safe and healthy.

Sincerely,

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

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District Director, Rappahannock Area Health District