



February 27, 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. This is a rapidly evolving situation. COVID-19 (previously known as the Novel Coronavirus – 19) began in China and has seen a rapid escalation in the number of cases and the number of countries impacted. Although most cases outside of China are travel-related, community spread of the virus is now being detected in a growing number of countries, including Hong Kong, Iran, Italy, Japan, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, and Thailand. **At this time, person-to-person spread in the United States appears to be limited, but the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends planning at all levels for the eventuality of community spread in the United States.**

The Virginia Department of Health and the local Thomas Jefferson Health District (TJHD) is preparing Virginia communities for the spread of COVID-19 in the United States. TJHD is working closely with community partners in all preparedness efforts and information sharing. **As of February 26, 2020, no one in Virginia has tested positive for COVID-19. The latest information is available at www.vdh.virginia.gov/coronavirus.** While the immediate risk of COVID-19 is believed to be low at this time, everyone can do their part in helping us to respond to this public health threat.

Recommendations for the public:

- The CDC recommends that travelers avoid all nonessential travel to China and South Korea. Individuals who are older or who have chronic medical conditions should consider postponing nonessential travel to Iran, Italy, and Japan.
- **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 flu activity. The flu is currently a greater threat to the public than the novel coronavirus. In addition, other respiratory viruses circulate during this time of year that are a greater threat in the U.S.
- **There is no need for individuals in the general public to wear facial masks.** Individuals who are sick with respiratory symptoms should stay home. If you must leave home, for example to get medical care, wear a facemask if you have one, or cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue. Wash your hands often to keep from spreading respiratory illnesses to others.
- Get the pneumonia vaccine if you are eligible. This is recommended for those adults older than 65, individuals 2 to 64 with certain medical conditions and adults 19 to 64 who smoke cigarettes. This vaccine does not protect you from the coronavirus but will lower your risk of bacterial pneumonia.
- Practice good personal health habits to prevent the flu and other respiratory viruses. Stay home when you are sick. Cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue or cough into your elbow. Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds and use hand sanitizer if soap and water are unavailable. Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces and objects.
- Create an emergency plan of action. Public health officials may recommend community actions based on the severity of a pandemic outbreak that will limit exposure, such as avoiding large gatherings. Developing a household plan for COVID-19 will help ensure readiness. The details of your plan should be based on the needs and daily routine of your household, including alternative arrangements for children, elders, and pets, and assuring that you have enough critical prescription medications.

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Recommendations for worksites and businesses:

- Promote the daily practice of everyday preventive actions at all times, including hand washing, respiratory etiquette (cover your cough or sneeze), and staying home when sick.
- Provide respiratory illness (like flu) prevention supplies in your workplace, such as soap, hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol, tissues, and trash baskets.
- Plan for workers absences. Develop flexible attendance and sick-leave policies. Update teleworking agreements so that staff may work from home, if applicable.
- Review your process for planning workplace services and events. Identify actions to take if you need to temporarily postpone or cancel events/work. Plan ways to continue essential services if on-site operations are reduced temporarily.

You can help by staying informed from trusted sites, like <http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/coronavirus>, and making sure your family is ready for a pandemic event: <https://www.cdc.gov/nonpharmaceutical-interventions/pdf/gr-pan-flu-ind-house.pdf>.

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

Sincerely,

Denise Bonds, MD, MPH

Director, Thomas Jefferson Health District

Virginia Department of Health

In Cooperation with the State Department of Health

