



March 6, 2020

Dear Community Partners:

I am writing 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 with information changing daily. The 2019 novel coronavirus (referred to as COVID-19) began in China and has seen a rapid escalation in the number of cases and the number of countries affected. 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 the United States. During the week of February 23, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported the first cases of community spread in the United States, as well as the first reported case of COVID-19 in a health care worker, and the first potential outbreak in a long-term care facility. Over the past week, more states have confirmed cases of COVID-19. **At this point, no one in Virginia has tested positive for COVID-19.** For the general public in Virginia, who are unlikely to be exposed to this virus at this time, the immediate health risk from COVID-19 is low.

TJHD is preparing as if it were the next pandemic, while hoping it is not. We are working closely with our Virginia Department of Health colleagues and local community partners in all preparedness efforts and information sharing. **To ensure district-wide communication and preparedness, TJHD will now host a weekly COVID-19 conference call for community partners every Tuesday at 9:00 AM.** Conference call phone number is 866-845-1266; participant code 81084228. Submit your questions in advance on [this form](#). *Please note: the line is limited to 50 participants so please try to limit your call to one per agency.*

TJHD has set up a hotline (434-972-6261) for all questions about COVID-19. The health department will staff this hotline every Monday through Friday from 8am-4:30pm to answer questions, triage calls, etc. People can leave messages that will be returned as soon as possible. If someone is experiencing a medical emergency, they should call 911.

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, especially individuals who are older or who have chronic medical conditions, avoid nonessential travel to countries with travel advisories. Find the latest travel advisories at: www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html
- **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.



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- 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.

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